

Handbook of Divination and Prognostication in China

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Handbook of Divination and Prognostication in China

*Part 1: Introduction to the Field of
Chinese Prognostication*

Edited by

Michael Lackner
Zhao Lu



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Cover illustration: The king asks a diviner for the prediction of war. Taken from the famous novel “The Romance of the Three Kingdoms”.

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General Introduction

Michael Lackner

The following introduction to the *Handbook of Divination and Prognostication in China* adopts the form of an itinerary around the coast of an island whose center seems to escape any ultimate characterization, because only outside perspectives are at our command. It is a periplus, the circumnavigating of the island of divination and prognostication in China and the different points of observation may shed some light on its evolution, its perception, its classifications, the presence of these phenomena in everyday life and their varying affinity to religion. Precisely because divination and prognostication were (and still are) pervasive, omnipresent and resilient in the culture of Chinese-speaking countries, a smallest common denominator for these practices is difficult to define. If one could leave aside the genealogical connotation of “family” in Wittgenstein’s theorem of “family resemblance” and could opt for the concept of a chain that connects certain (but not arbitrary) links, also inherent in Wittgenstein’s deliberations, the suggested periplus might lead us along those links of our itinerary’s voyage that help us gain insight into the multifaceted nature of our topic. And this way of a circumnavigation may be more helpful than any conventional form of introduction. After having read the first draft of this introduction, a friend of mine suggested a persistent fog that is preventing determining the location of that center. At times, patches of fog may be briefly lifting while we are circumnavigating it, but it remains evasive. With the present first volume of the *Handbook*, we are – to use yet another image from European Antiquity – entering a cave equipped with a torch, hitting upon an even more intricate complex of caves and trying to draw a map. The second volume will present the drawings on the wall.

1 The Western Scenic Outpost

From its very beginning, the encounter between Westerners and Asian divinatory practices was ill-starred. Even William of Rubruck (ca. 1215–ca. 1270), otherwise very objective, almost neutral in his depiction of the diviners and shamans at the Mongol Court, could not shy away from making a categorical judgement on their practices; when scolding an “hermenian” (i.e. armenian) monk, for his “ignorance,” he remarks:

After this I discovered that the monk had called this said Saracen diviner into his chapel with his wife, and had had dust sifted and had them divine for him by it. He had also a Ruthenian deacon with him who divined for him. When I had learned this, I was horrified at his ignorance, and I told him: "Brother, a man who is full of the Holy Ghost, who teaches all things, should not seek answers or advice from diviners; all such things are forbidden, and those who are given to them are excommunicated."¹

Let us note that this verdict is addressed to a fellow Christian for not abiding to an interdiction that is shared by believers in the Christian faith. In spite of Rubruck's sense of mission, his descriptions of "pagan" practices reveal a relatively unemotional attitude, which is only rarely suspended by interjections like the following one: "These same diviners disturb the atmosphere with their incantations; and when it is so cold from natural causes that they can bring no relief, they pick out some persons in the camps whom they accuse of having brought about the cold, and they are put to death at once."² His presence, his mission and his thought on divination, though, passed unnoticed in China and no Chinese source has ever mentioned Rubruck.

Unlike Rubruck, the Jesuit missionaries set out to attack the entire system of popular "superstitions," mainly in order to prevent the converts from falling back into the routine of their creeds and rituals. Giulio Aleni (艾儒略, 1582–1649) pointed to the lack of efficacy of practices like *fengshui* 風水, hemerology and horoscopy, the convert Zhu Zongyuan (朱宗元, ca. 1617–1660) went further by considering mantic practices as a heresy and Ferdinand Verbiest (南懷仁, 1623–1688), in order to refute his eminent opponent Yang Guangxian (楊光先, 1597–1669) composed several treatises against the "absurdities" (*wang* 妄) of choosing auspicious days and divination and prognostication in general.³ These texts, written in Chinese, were denunciations of practices from within Chinese culture, but the main lines of the argumentation were based on concepts that came from without: Western Science and, perhaps even more interesting, the idea that classical works like the *Changes*, should be read symbolically, a hermeneutic device derived from the "fourfold sense of Scripture" in biblical exegesis.⁴ And it is obvious that even the most prominent Jesuit

1 Rockhill: *The Journey of William of Rubruck*.

2 Ibid.

3 See Chu, "Against Prognostication," 433–50.

4 Known as the literal, typological, tropological/moral, and anagogical reading. A "symbolical" reading as suggested by Ferdinand Verbiest SJ (see note 3), might come close to the second reading, which has also been called "allegorical." Pope Gregory the Great (r.590–604) reduced the fourfold sense to a threefold one, interpreting the "typological/allegorical" reading as any

explorer of the *Changes*, Joachim Bouvet (白晉, 1656–1730) did not perceive that work as a manual for divination.⁵

To a certain extent, all the contributions in this volume deal with the *Changes*, the *Yijing* 易經, a book that has left deep traces in Chinese intellectual history. Most of the reflections on the possibility of divination per se, as a kind of meta-theory, are to be found in literati comments on this work.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Science and Christian orthodoxy remained the yardsticks of Western assessments of Chinese mantic practices. In his contribution to this volume, Richard Smith has some elucidating examples of nineteenth and early twentieth centuries judgments of Chinese “superstitions” by experienced western “China hands”:

The remarks of S.W. Williams, a long-time resident in the nineteenth century, are typical in tone and substance: “No people are more enslaved by fear of the unknown than the Chinese, and none resort more frequently to sortilege to ascertain whether an enterprise will be successful or a proposed remedy avail to a cure. This desire actuates all classes, and thousands and myriads of persons take advantage of it to their own profit.”

Similarly, Henrietta Shuck asserted that “There is probably no country in the present age of the world, in which divination is carried on to so great an extent as in China.” William Milne observed in 1820 that “Astrology, divination, geomancy and necromancy everywhere prevail [in China]”; and several decades later, A.P. Parker stated that fortune-telling in China was “universally believed in.” At the end of the century, Arthur Smith remarked that “the number of Chinese who make a living out of ... [divination] is past all estimation.”⁶

Apart from the fact that these observers unanimously make a case for the acceptance of divination in all layers of society (which is still wrongly questioned by staunch defenders of Chinese “rationality” in the Western sense),⁷ their contempt for mantic arts is apparent throughout their descriptions. James Legge (1815–1897), to whom we owe the translation of *The Chinese Classics*⁸ described the *Changes* as “a farrago of emblematic representations.” And Richard Smith adds that “although he admitted the *Changes* was ‘an

other meaning or the non-literal meaning of events, words and things. See *Patrologia Latina*, LXXV, cols. 5–16.

5 See Collani, *P. Joachim Bouvet*.

6 See Richard Smith's contribution in this volume.

7 E.g. Chan, *Religious Trends in Modern China*, 141–42.

8 Legge, *The Chinese Classics*.

important monument of architecture,' he characterized it as 'very bizarre in its conception and execution.'⁹

Jan Jacob Maria De Groot (1854–1921) devoted most of his life's work to the study of Chinese attitudes towards the human soul and some of the mantic techniques connected with them. In the preface to his monumental *Religious System of China*, he states that "as in the case of many, if not of most barbarous and semi-civilized peoples, the human soul is in China the original form of all beings of a higher order. Its worship is therefore the basis of all religion in that country."¹⁰

"Semi-civilized," "enslaved," such are the epitheta for a backward culture that still awaits the light of rationality.

Another monumental pioneering work presents us with precisely the above-mentioned mélange of Christian orthodoxy and nineteenth–twentieth century western rationality, imbued by unavowed sediments of Enlightenment thought. Father Henri Doré's SJ (1859–1931) *Recherches sur les superstitions en Chine*¹¹ is a meticulous study based on his field work in the provinces of Jiangsu 江蘇 and Anhui 安徽 and his knowledge of relevant written sources. In chapters VII and VIII, Doré deals extensively with mantic arts, like sooth-saying, physiognomics, the Wenwang divination (a description which remains quite unique in sinology), the *liuren* 六壬 technique, casting lots with the *Yijing*, dissection and manipulation of characters, the choice of auspicious days, the temple oracle, horoscopy, almanacs, *fengshui*, and many other forms of prediction.

In both De Groot's and Doré's works, there is a bizarre kind of hate-love relationship with these practices, creeds and customs; they devoted a vital part of their scientific efforts to denounce and vilify the enemy – superstition: De Groot in the name of advanced civilization, while Doré and, to some extent, Legge, felt justified by Christian orthodoxy.¹²

The ideological absorption of relevant western ideas by the "Chinese Enlightenment" with its political and social consequences has been extensively dealt with.¹³ There is nothing notably novel in the assessments of traditional practices by Chinese intellectuals, which has not been articulated by

9 Smith, "Jesuit Interpretations of the *Yijing*."

10 De Groot, *The Religious System of China*, 1.

11 Shanghai: Tushanwan, 1911–1938; English translation: *Researches into Chinese Superstitions*, by Henri Doré SJ.

12 See for Doré's ultimate motivation: "De tout cœur, j'ai travaillé d'abord pour les missionnaires, ayant pour but et d'être utile à mes frères d'armes, et d'aider au salut de mes chers Chinois." Doré, *Recherches sur les superstitions en Chine*, 1:4.

13 Nedustop, *Superstitious Regimes*; Goossaert and Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*.

their western predecessors. On the other hand, the few efforts to legitimize traditional mantic arts by harmonizing them with “science” remained rather marginal for a long time¹⁴ and regained some impact as late as by the 1990s.¹⁵

2 A Theoretical Haltpoint: Chance and Free Will

In some cases Doré, who qualified the entire body of mantic practices as “recettes employées par ces charlatans,” entered into a dialog with practitioners; although it is not clear to what extent these dialogs are fictitious, semi-fictitious or actually having taken place (sometimes he qualifies them as “imagined”¹⁶), they are interesting because of the exchange of arguments that might well have been used in the mission. The conversations usually start with calling into question the rationale behind mantic procedures, in the following case the throw of the “moon blocks” (*jiaobei* 筊杯) for obtaining an answer from a deity: “(Question:) Whether these blocks fall with the oval side up or down, is due to mere chance, and the physical dexterity of the operator, in the same manner as when one throws dice on a table; how then can a person draw therefrom a favorable or unfavorable prognostic? (Answer:) It is the gods who arrange these combinations. (Question:) Why then do they constantly disagree when inquiry is made about the same matter? Have the gods two minds when declaring their will, and do they not contradict themselves in the most flagrant manner? (Answer:) We are unable to discover the wherefore of these things, but it is the custom, and so we inquire no further.”¹⁷

Doré must have read Cicero, since his arguments are very close to the skeptic attitude expressed in *De Divinatione*.¹⁸ The interesting point here is the introduction of the concept of “chance.” Most oracles that are based on at least some kind of computation (which is even the case for the three ways the “moon blocks” can fall down) involve a moment western philosophical convention would call arbitrary or accidental. Dividing the yarrow stalks, putting down the domino pieces, picking a “fortune stick” (*chouqian* 抽籤), throwing dice and other man-made oracles do have that arbitrary moment at their beginning, to be followed by an – often computationally grounded – interpretation. However, the very rationale of an oracle is to convey meaning to

14 Li and Lackner, “Contradictory Forms of Knowledge?” 451–85.

15 See Stéphanie Homola’s contribution to this volume, and Lackner, “Die Renaissance divinatorischer Techniken in der VR China,” 239–64.

16 Doré, *Research into Chinese Superstitions*, 350.

17 Doré, *Research into Chinese Superstitions*, 354f.

18 Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 11:86: “What reliance, pray, can you put in these lots, which at Fortune’s nod are shuffled and drawn by the hand of a child?”

a precise individual situation. If we suppose the existence of a meaning inherent in the answer of the oracle, then mere chance is to be excluded. To confront a Chinese diviner with the idea of randomness, like Doré ventured, provides evidence for the radical incompatibility of his conceptual universe with the belief system of divination (a system, which might not have been shared in its entirety by the Chinese literati, as Doré ascertains).¹⁹ Ascribing a meaning to a situation that has provoked a question is the ultimate aim of divination. It is therefore no wonder that Wang Chong 王充 (27–97), who counts among the few radical skeptics with regard to the serviceableness of divination (except for physiognomy) attributes, in a deterministic attitude, favorable and auspicious signs to persons of good fortune and happy omens to the prosperity of the state²⁰ has explicitly conceptualized “chance” (*ou* 偶). His perspective is in sharp contrast to the view of divination prevailing in his times that does not allow any notion of blind coincidence.²¹

Even the skeptical Milan Kundera, a firm believer in “chance,” understands the significance we bestow on chance, the connection we establish, the message and the signs we read into it, as an aesthetic mechanism, without which we cannot live but miserably. “Our day-to-day life is bombarded with fortuities, or, to be more precise, with accidental meetings of people and events we call coincidences. (...) They are composed like music. (...) it is right to chide man for being blind to such coincidences in his daily life. For he thereby deprives his life of a dimension of beauty.” “Not necessity, but chance is full of magic.”²²

Moreover, Doré’s argument that the gods constantly “disagree” does not take into account the utterly individual character of each prognostication, a fact that has been emphasized by Carlo Ginzburg.²³

Another concept that has no systematic place within the Chinese system of divination is “freedom.” Doré on auspicious dates: “As set forth in the foregoing system, everything that happens in this world is the necessary outcome of months, days and hours, or in other words it is pure fatalism (...) Who does not see by a moment’s reflexion the falsity of such a theory? Moreover, who is not aware that many events turn out favorably or unfavorably owing to the choice made by man’s free-will (the French original has *liberté*, not *libre arbitre*), or to circumstances quite independent of the day or hour?”²⁴

19 Doré, English edition, 341; but Doré gives no reference for such skeptical voices!

20 Kalinowski, *Wang Chong, Balance des Discours*, 190–94.

21 Op. cit., 26–32.

22 Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, 25f.

23 Ginzburg, “Clues: Roots of a Scientific Paradigm,” 273–88; and “Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm,” 96–125.

24 Doré, *Research into Chinese Superstitions*, 378f.

Categorically opposing fatalism to free will is an idea deeply rooted in Western tradition. Chinese thought has never explicitly conceptualized freedom, but the absence of a concept does not necessarily imply the absence of a behavioral reality: the examples of Chinese people negotiating with fate, either by means of changing their moral conduct or via magical devices,²⁵ are legion. Far from being finally settled in philosophical thought and in daily practice, this constant compromise between what is destined and what is in one's own hands constitutes an issue that pervades reflection in China for centuries.²⁶

Let us dwell again on the idea of chance. Carlo Ginzburg has made a case for a "divinatory paradigm," where, from archaic hunters up to Sherlock Holmes, "footprints in the mud" are being interpreted, "traces considered as symptoms," and an "attaining of knowledge that implies an inevitable margin of hazardousness, of conjecture" takes place.²⁷ Holmes, the detective, is able to "examine the most negligible details." Insofar as there is an epistemology of the hidden, "based on clues" (which is the *raison d'être* of divination), one might agree with the concept of conjecture – but this concept is not akin to "hazardousness,"²⁸ precisely because astrological or medical conjecture²⁹ rely on systems. Ginzburg is right to point to the fact that we are dealing with practices "having as objects individual cases." However, the mere semiotic accumulation of "traces," "details," and "footprints" (in the sense of a relationship between signifier and signified) leads to nothing more than algorithms. A generous definition of divination might imply an algorithmic approach or some kind of "pattern recognition," but this does not bear on most of the Chinese divinatory practices; even the system of "Plum Blossom Changes Computation" (*meihua yishu* 梅花易數), one of the techniques predominantly based on circumstantial conditions, relies on time and the figures of the *Changes*. Chinese divination, as far as it is based on some kind of calculation, requires a system and a theory, although the theoretical background may be more or less explicit.

3 The Angle of Taxonomy

In his contribution to this volume, Stephen Bokenkamp cites Cicero, the forefather of Western Theories on divination, and it seems appropriate to briefly

25 For the breadth of definitions of "magic," see Otto and Stausberg, *Defining Magic*.

26 Raphals, "Fate, Fortune, Chance, and Luck," 537–74.

27 Ginzburg, "Clues. Roots of a scientific paradigm," 273ff.

28 Ibid.

29 Which Albert the Great subsumed under the same category, see Lackner, "Introduction," 5.

recall Cicero's Classification in order to get a better grasp of the varieties of Chinese divination techniques as well as their underlying similarity:

You divided divination into two kinds, one artificial and the other natural. "The artificial, you said, consists in part of conjecture and in part of long-continued observation; while the natural is that which the soul has seized, or, rather, has obtained, from a source outside itself – that is, from God, whence all human souls have been drawn off, received, or poured out."

Under the head of artificial divination you placed predictions made from the inspection of entrails, those made from lightnings and portents, those made by augurs, and by persons who depend entirely upon premonitory signs. Under the same head you included practically every method of prophecy in which conjecture was employed. "Natural divination, on the other hand, according to your view, is the result – 'the effusion,' as it were – of mental excitement, or it is the prophetic power which the soul has during sleep while free from bodily sensation and worldly care."³⁰

Unlike Michael Loewe, who distinguishes between divination and omen observation,³¹ Cicero subsumes augury and portents to the "artificial" part of divination. And, in fact, we may – in slight modification or amplification of Cicero – establish a difference between the artificial production of signs (i.e. oracles) and the observation of signs in Nature. However, even portents need the human mind to be classified and their meaning has to be divined. Hence, the common denominator of divination consists in reading signs, whether "provoked, perceived or calculated" (see Marc Kalinowski's contribution). Let us remind that one of the first, if not the first mention of the Delphic oracle says ὁ ἄναξ, οὗ τὸ μαντεῖόν ἐστι τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖς, οὔτε λέγει οὔτε κρύπτει ἀλλὰ σημαίνει. (The Lord whose is the oracle in Delphi neither declares nor hides, but sets forth by signs).³²

On the other hand, many texts ascribe a divine, "natural" power to signs produced by humans (e.g. the milfoil and the tortoise). Therefore, the "natural" phenomena have to be divined by the human mind, but the instruments made

³⁰ Cicero, *De divinatione*, 2:11; see also Stephen Bokenkamp's contribution to this volume.

³¹ See Zhao Lu's contribution to this volume; Loewe is probably referring to oracles, not to the entire body of divination.

³² Heraclitus, fragment 93, see "On the Universe," 473.

for divination purposes by humans are invested with “natural,” “divine” characteristics. Let us remind that even Bouché-Leclercq kept to Cicero’s original distinction, which he amplified by listing eight categories of “inductive” methods (which correspond to the “artificial” part of divination) and three kinds of “intuitive” techniques (for the “natural” ways of divination).³³

All interpretation requires intuition. Intuition, though, might be less relevant for understanding the prescriptions of the almanac, but consulting these instructions necessarily involves a divinatory process that was first initiated by the authors of the almanac, and followed by the questions of the consultant.

The present volume makes a case for a broad definition of divination. Oracles pertain to that field, as far as they are connected to a precise situation that has brought upon a question, notwithstanding the length of time which the answer will cover: the next day, month, years, or longer periods. Even personalized horoscopy that has a “characterological” design at its outset, can be used for determining the appropriate moment for an undertaking and has therefore a strong oracular component.

Intuition might be called the capacity to skip a few steps in the chain of cause and effect (Ginzburg would probably be delighted by this definition). However, in an intellectual universe that privileges “correlative logic”³⁴ over causality, intuition needs not to be conceptualized.

Radu Bikir has shown numerous examples for the belief that efficient diviners ought to be endowed with intuition, but their efficiency does not necessarily depend on superhuman authorities.³⁵

However, for the sake of an even broader picture of the universe of Chinese divination, the present volume takes into account Cicero’s second variant, “natural” divination. As Marc Kalinowski shows in his contribution to this volume, bibliographies of traditional China did not include divinatory statements produced by inspiration. Bibliographical classifications of “mantic arts” (*shushu* 術數, always based on some kind of computation) have gradually expelled magical and exorcistic practices, but prophecies do not figure in these catalogs at all. It is by no means “imperialism of categories”³⁶ that has motivated us to incorporate prophetic practices, but rather a concept that does justice to all the forms of Chinese divination as the ensemble of the ways to

33 Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination dans l'Antiquité*, vol. 1, 124ff.

34 We owe that wonderful term to Chang Tung-Sun 張東蓀, see Chang, “A Chinese Philosopher’s Theory of Knowledge,” 203–26.

35 Bikir, “Divination et destinée sous la dynastie Song,” 65.

36 In the sense of Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, “The Imperialism of Categories,” 5–14.

disclose the hidden – in past, present, and future. In our case, privileging an etic over an emic definition represents an enormous advantage.

One could, of course, accept “revealing” as a common denominator for divination and, at the same time, the category of “decoding,” “deciphering,” but then we have to face the problematic position of revelations that do not have to be interpreted by an act of sophisticated decoding, simply because they are self-evident, as it is the case for unambiguous prophecies. An unambiguous oracle may be considered as the lowest form of divination, but do prophetic predictions that are immediately obvious also pertain to that category? And what classification is to be applied if that kind of prediction has been obtained through a mediumistic inspiration? A precise definition of divination will always consist in a kind of periplus that tries to do justice to different perspectives by circumnavigating this multifaceted island. We also should not forget the role ritual plays in accompanying, and sometimes even overshadowing divination: oracle bones inscriptions after the reign of Wuding 武丁 (r. 1250–1192 BCE) confirm the growing importance of the ritual per se and the gradual loss of significance of the questions posed to the oracle.³⁷ And even for some of the “Daybooks” (*rishu* 日書, see below), Marc Kalinowski has observed that “the aim of the divination is not so much to predict the future as to define and control the ritual protocols of prayer and exorcism, which accompany the consultants’ requests.”³⁸

Divination can also be defined by the perception of its effects; if it were completely devoid of any intrinsic rationality and if the future had always shown different outcomes, it would barely have survived for millennia. In his book on divination in the Ancient Near East, Stefan M. Maul names plausibility as a criterion for the long-lasting success of seemingly abstruse methods, like haruspicy in Ancient Mesopotamia. The diviner is committed to this plausibility and his predictions have to adapt to possible scenarios.³⁹ This statement holds true for the case of prognostication in China, too; and the inextricable link of divination with politics, either in the guise of political advice provided by experts, or in omenology (again to be interpreted by specialists) is present in all the contributions of this volume. The control of the Mandate of Heaven has been as instrumental for political reasoning as for the means of decision-making among which we find divination at a privileged place.

37 Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 117–22; Keightley, “The Shang,” 243–45.

38 See Fabrizio Pregadio’s contribution.

39 Maul, *Die Wahrsagekunst im Alten Orient*, 317–19.

4 Continuing the Circumnavigation: a Multitude of Perspectives

For decades, Chinese divinatory practices have led a rather shadowy existence in sinological studies. Considered as part of “Chinese superstitions” by both western scholars and, later, Chinese intellectuals, they formed a body of rejected knowledge. The rejection may have been explicit (as it is the case with De Groot, Doré and some other few pioneers of the war against Chinese tradition, including some representatives of the Chinese Enlightenment), but in most cases these practices were ignored and left unreported. A striking example for this ignorance is the fact that, although Chinese *belles lettres* (in both poetry and prose) abound in mentioning the appearance and deeds of diviners, there are extremely few studies devoted to this topic. How many chances have been missed by this neglect!⁴⁰

The present volume is a result of the recent change in the assessment of mantic arts in China, a change that has been prepared by pioneering western scholars like Richard Smith, Edward Shaughnessy, Lisa Raphals, Donald Harper, and Marc Kalinowski, to name just a few. And there is fine scholarship in the Chinese-speaking world: the historian and archaeologist Li Ling's 李零 outstanding research on technical specialists in Ancient China⁴¹ is one of the first trailblazers of this field, but their number is growing. For literati assessments of mantic arts, we have the monumental anthology compiled by Chang Yung-tang.⁴² And let us not forget the thought-provoking book by Léon Vandermeersch, who makes a case for the birth of the Chinese writing system from the spirit of divination,⁴³ thus echoing Nietzsche's rhetoric figure of the “Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music.”

We try to provide the reader with an approach that is nuanced, global and contextualized. We have left behind age-old reductionist perspectives, like fate and fatalism in philosophy, the seemingly unsurmountable opposition of science and pseudo-science and, finally, the distinction between religion and superstition, categories that never had any heuristic value. From Shang dynasty oracle bone inscriptions up to the present time, the ideas, concepts, and practices of Chinese diviners shall be approached as an important field of its own right, with their influence on all layers of society.

40 A first attempt at delineating this immense field is: Lackner, Tam, Gänßbauer, and Yip, *Fate and Prognostication in the Chinese Literary Imagination*.

41 Li, *Zhongguo fangshu kao*, and the sequel *Zhongguo fangshu xu kao*.

42 Chang, *Shushu yiwen luncong*.

43 Vandermeersch, *Les deux raisons de la pensée chinoise*, 195–226.

The *Handbook of Divination and Prognostication in China* is divided into two parts: the present one is concerned with general fields in Chinese studies, where divination has played (or is still playing) an eminent role, while the second one will be devoted to a close description of the most important divinatory techniques that have been used (or continue to be used) in the tradition.

In his introduction, *Zhao Lu* offers a critical assessment of the state of the art in the studies on divinatory techniques. There is a long and impressive tradition of scholarship with regard to traditional Chinese cosmology, whose focus, however, was on the “philosophical” aspects with its “intellectual giants.” Since mantic practices were part of “rejected knowledge” and occupied only a marginal position in western scholarship, sinological studies projected basically the western quest for “key concepts” and philosophical systems on China. On the other hand, the few scholars who were vitally and evenhandedly interested in Chinese divination, often were inclined to make categorizations that were framed in Western and modern categories. No matter whether in science or in humanities, blind spots are difficult to identify and it is even more arduous to fill the gap.

What makes people trust in the reliability or, at least, plausibility of divination? The overarching acceptance of mantic practices in all layers of traditional Chinese society is simply unconceivable without a shared worldview and cosmology. As Zhao has shown, Western (and to a large extent Chinese) scholarship has paid attention to that superstructure while neglecting the perspective of its enactment in daily life experience.

Richard Smith's analysis of divinatory practices in the context of correlative cosmology makes a case for the unity and cohesiveness of traditional Chinese culture in premodern times, while not neglecting the diversity of local cultures. Looking for a common denominator, Smith pinpoints the “concepts of *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽, the *wuxing* 五行 (variously translated five agents, five activities, five phases, five elements, five qualities, etc.), and *qi* 氣 (variously translated as life breath, ether energy, pneuma, vital essence, material force, primordial substance, psychophysical stuff, etc.).” Notwithstanding certain nuances in the assessment of the relationship between the “cosmic variables,” these concepts gradually embraced discourses (and practices) in all sectors of society and resulted in a common language. Divination became a cornerstone within this universe, mainly because “all segments of Chinese society sought to know and alter their future, medical or otherwise, and they attempted to do so with the assistance of shamans and other fortune-tellers, as well as more conventional healers – sometimes in combination.”⁴⁴

44 This observation resonates well with Mayfair Yang's remarks on the role of divination in present-day Wenzhou: (...) the reliance on divination bespeaks a reverence for the larger

Would western civilization have had the *Changes* instead of the *Revelation* of St. John as a canonical guideline for coping with the future, it would definitely have taken a radically different shape. Smith provides the reader with the manifold aspects of the evolution of this classic, which absorbed (and produced), in the course of time, a constantly amplified amount of criss-cross references to cosmological coordinates in time and space, including, for instance, the sexagenary system of the Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches, and, much later, the Yellow River Chart and the Luo Scripture. The *Changes* were a book and, at the same time, (the book of) Nature. Smith also deals in great detail with the inextricable connection of the cosmological grid encompassing mantic practices like *fengshui*, fate-calculation and the consultation of the almanac.

Etic definitions of Chinese divination are useful for the comprehension of the vast scope of the phenomenon, but first and foremost, we need its emic delineations. Marc Kalinowski gives “a full account of the extreme diversity of forms of divination practiced in China by approaching them through the lens of classifications that have been proposed for them by local literati and intellectuals over the long term.” Since there is no Ciceronian generic term for these arts, we are invited to inquire into a panoply of expressions. Kalinowski examines the terminological evolution in four steps: a) Classifications of mantic arts before the emergence of bibliographic catalogs. In this part, Kalinowski draws on the divinatory vocabulary found on Shang dynasty oracle bones and archaeological discoveries of the Warring States period and the Han (mainly the “daybooks” *rishu* 日書),⁴⁵ but also on transmitted texts, like the *Zuozhuan* and the *Zhouli*. b) The “bibliographic treatise compiled at the end of the Western Han (206 BCE–6 CE) and taken up again in abbreviated form during the first century CE in the *Book of Han* (*Hanshu* 漢書) under the title “Treatise on the Arts and Letters” (*Yiwen zhi* 藝文志). The classification of mantic arts established in the *Yiwen zhi* constitutes the point of departure of a long tradition and a key reference for all subsequent schemes.” c) “In the third part three important bibliographic catalogs written between the Tang (618–907) and the Qing (1644–1912) are analyzed with the goal to highlight the changes that have occurred during this period in the classification and typology of mantic arts that are given their almost definite shape during the eighteenth century.” d) “The fourth part rounds off the preceding one by a comparison between

hidden and unknown forces that move the cosmos (...) It bespeaks a desire to align one's actions according to powerful patterns of divine nature and cosmos, and a wish to avoid violating whatever cosmic patterns the diviner is able to glean. Thus, to consult diviners is to take an active rather than passive stance – to peer into the unknown, anticipate future events, and plan appropriate actions.” Yang, *Re-enchanting Modernity*, 89.

45 Harper and Kalinowski, *Books of Fate and Popular Culture*.

classifications established by bibliographers and those that can be found in imperial encyclopedias (*leishu* 類書)."

Far from being empty classificatory lemmata, in most cases these terms reveal the actual practices and their experts that were the subject of the works classified by the bibliographers. However, even in the part devoted to the vocabulary used in the texts before the end of the Han, Kalinowski identifies a three-partite terminological distinction of discrete lexical groups: "action verbs," "verbs of perception," and of "cognitive function." This preliminary categorization which differentiates divination by producing signs, by observing portents or examining symptoms, and by selecting or counting, is still too narrow for a general typology of divination, because "the threefold division adopted therein – divination by producing signs, by observing portents or examining symptoms, and by selecting or counting – neither takes into account the diversity of actions accomplished by the diviner between the time when he starts his work and the end of the procedure, nor does it take into account the social context in which divination was practiced, and the status of the practitioner – official, professional diviner, or simple individual." Therefore, through a detailed analysis of the entries contained in the bibliographies (up to Late Imperial China with its imperial encyclopedias) Kalinowski presents us with the increasingly refined terminology of mantic arts. In spite of a remarkable continuity, constant regrouping, predominantly due to institutional and ideological factors, was a characteristic of the classificatory endeavor. The growing tendency to exclude astral sciences and mathematics in Late Imperial China on the one hand, and the inclusion of more and more "popular" techniques on the other is a good example for a (perhaps rather paradoxical) selective process that incorporated both rigorous intellectual considerations and an increasing tolerance towards hitherto neglected practices.

The archaeological discoveries of recent decades have dramatically challenged previous assumptions on the evolution of divinatory practices in China. In her contribution, *Constance Cook* presents us with a tour d'horizon leading from Shang dynasty oracle bones to Warring States and Han dynasty manuscripts. Throughout the three parts of this article (Oracle bones; stalk divination; hemerology) astonishing new insights can be gained; among them, the longue durée of plastromancy, the existence of a multitude of stalk divination methods (cleromancy), and, in this context, the fact that early bronze age production of numerical series was not linked to the *Changes*, and, moreover, that there are some texts that "reveal a focus on day signs and divination not seen in the transmitted *Changes*." Numerous documents bear witness to the importance of hemerology in many techniques. Cook examines the technical and ritual vocabulary of the oracle bones, and demonstrates how inscriptions

on bamboo slips (e.g. from the fourth century BCE) still preserve accounts on turtle divination. However, a large number of slips contain (sometimes simplified) methods for obtaining a hexagram (*gua* 卦) that differ considerably from the canonical version of the *Changes*; and the same holds true for the respective interpretive texts. Although this great wealth of techniques fell into oblivion (until it was excavated in recent times), which included versions like the *Guicang* 歸藏 (Returning to be stored/Returning to the storehouse) and probably the *Lianshan* 連山 (Connected mountains) – in conjunction with the *Changes of Zhou* 周易 later known as the “Three Changes” *san Yi* 三易 –, the temptation to engender new procedures to obtain a *gua* and/or to produce novel interpretations never really came to an end: suffice it to think of the still popular *Plum Blossom Changes Computation* or the *Hexagrams of King Wen* (*Wenwang gua* 文王卦).

The choice of an auspicious date for important undertakings is not only in China a vital characteristic of divination. Cook devotes the last part of her contribution to the vast panoply of texts, diagrams, and instruments for hemerological purposes, which included a proper situating of omens and meteorological phenomena. “Whether predicting rainfall or interpreting dreams, a knowledge of calendrical astrology was essential.” Once again, we are confronted with a plethora of approaches that encompassed taking into account “Stellar Lodges (*xiu* 宿), Stem and Branch signs, the Five Agents, Yin and Yang, and the stars of the Dipper as well a variety of ‘cosmograph’ or astrolabe style diagrams (and artifacts *shi* 式), some with explanatory manuals.”

“All forms of Chinese divination were spiritual, but some were more spiritual than others”⁴⁶ and there are different degrees of religious affinity. The probably most spiritual way to acquire knowledge of the hidden is prophecy. In his definition of the divinatory forms that are the subject of his contribution, *Stephen Bokenkamp* remains faithful to Cicero: “The natural finds its source in the divine, which is described as inspiring the mind and soul, whether the recipient is a special medium or an ordinary person whom the gods inspire only during sleep.” He therefore delineates the meaning of prophecy, limits his essay to utterances inspired by superior beings, examines the specific language of the prophecies, and provides the reader with an analysis of their different genres.

If we were in need of a generic term for what the “special medium” or the “ordinary person” experiences, we could have recourse to “revelation,” although

46 Smith, *Fortune-Tellers and Philosophers*, 221.

this term only expresses a family resemblance.⁴⁷ As has been mentioned above, the bibliographic treatises on mantic arts did not contain “natural divination,” so Bokenkamp draws on a variety of other sources, like records in dynastic histories and collections of religious writings. The main mechanisms of transmitting the divine message are 1) direct revelation, where the medium “indicates that a deity has inhabited their body (*fushen* 附身); 2) “direct transcription or automatic writing,” a method which “requires that the medium transcribe the words of the gods directly”; 3) Planchette or spirit writing (*fuji* 扶乩, *fuluan* 扶鸞), and 4) dream interpretation.

Poetic verse is crucial for numerous prophecies.⁴⁸ On the basis of impressive examples, Bokenkamp shows how several specificities of the Chinese language (homophony, paronomastic superimpositions, metaphors, even glosolalia) contributed to cryptic character of the utterances. Let us remind that the *Changes*, too, have a good deal of rhymes. But the cryptic implies an appeal to deciphering: either by listening to the pronouncements (a faculty that is lost for us) or through the technique of dissection and manipulating characters (*chaizi* 拆字).⁴⁹ The travail of decoding is precisely the task of divination, and prophecy is no exception in this regard.

Besides texts that have either been exhaustively studied, like the Han dynasty apocrypha (*weishu* 緯書), or are still widespread popular prophetic texts, like the *tuibeitu* 推背圖 (Back-pushing charts), there is a large number of Daoist scriptures with a prophetic aura. Of particular interest is the fourth century revelation transmitted to Yang Xi 楊羲, because “we are more certain how he communicated with his gods.” In his postface to the *Zhen'gao* 真誥 (Declarations of the perfected), the Daoist Patriarch Tao Hongjing who collected Yang's experiences in 499, “calls the revelations of the Perfected ‘announcements delivered orally, similar to Buddhist scriptures that all announce the Buddha said.’” And, “further, the revelations themselves portray the gods who descend to Yang asking him to write out their revelations, a fact he dutifully records.” In Yang's case,

47 However, Grégoire Espeset has identified fifteen different terms that have been translated uniformly as “revelation” in Western sinology *kai* 開 “ouvrir,” “s'ouvrir”; *qi* 啓 “ouvrir grand,” “faire connaître”; *chu* 出 “sortir,” “faire sortir,” “émaner,” “produire”; *fa* 發 “émettre,” “décocher, tirer (un projectile)”; *lu* 露 “laisser apparaître, exposer”; *shi* 示 “montrer,” “être montré, exposé à la vue”; *xian* 現 (見) “paraître,” “se montrer,” “se manifester”; *xian* 顯 “être manifeste,” “révéler (au sens courant)”; *chui* 垂 “pendre,” “laisser pendre,” “léguer”; *jiang* 降 “descendre,” “faire descendre,” “envoyer (vers le bas)”; *fu* 付 “donner,” “livrer,” “délivrer,” “confier”; *shou* 授 “remettre,” “conférer”; *chuan* 傳 “faire suivre,” “transmettre,” “communiquer”; *jiao* 教 “enseigner,” “instruire”; *shuo* 說 “dire,” “exposer, énoncer.” Espeset, “La religiosité de l'Autre,” 51.

48 Strickmann, *Chinese Poetry and Prophecy*.

49 For this technique, see Schmiedl, *Chinese Character Manipulation*.

the gods do speak, which reminds us of Cicero's definition of oracles: "Oracula ex eo ipso appellatae sunt quod inest in his deorum oratio."⁵⁰

Communication through writing is distinctive for the practices in popular religion Philip Clart's contribution deals with. After defining popular religion as "the religion of people of all classes beyond the institutional contexts immediately controlled and run by professional clergy or the central state authorities, yet these contexts may still play various roles in the sphere of popular religion," Clart addresses three fields where prognostication is particularly vibrant: Chinese geomancy *fengshui*, the throwing of divination blocks and the drawing of lots (which are the features of what has been called the "Chinese temple oracle" by Werner Banck⁵¹) and, finally, spirit possession that is manifest (but not exclusively) in practices like "planchette" or "spirit writing" (*fuji* 扶乩, *fuluan* 扶鸞). All these practices "contribute to the 'world-making' of Chinese culture(s), here in particular in that cultural sphere conventionally designated as 'popular religion.'" With *fengshui*, we are again in the realm of correlative cosmology, but there is a powerful element of social communication inherent in it. "Geomancy furnishes a language of resistance and competition in conflicts between local communities about resource allocation or between local communities and state agencies, for example, when infrastructure projects such as railway lines, roads, bridges, or canals are deemed to disturb the geomantic properties of the community's territory." Whereas in *fengshui* there is no apparent need to communicate with gods and ghosts (and the contact with the ancestors remains indirect), the throwing of blocks and the drawing of lots (which often can result in a combined action) imperatively demand a sacred surrounding. Since the blocks in general provide only three possible answers (a yes, a no, and a rejection of the question), the communication with the superior beings is free insofar as any kind of question can be brought before the spiritual authorities; the answers provided by the lots, however, though vast in scope, are limited.

An even more immediate and dramatic contact with spirits is established by possession. Clart makes an interesting distinction between the well-known phenomena of "relieving the world" *jishi* 濟世 and "text production" *zhushu* 著書 (which is sometimes also called *jiaohua* 教化, "educating") with regard to prognostication: whereas the first type refers to answering an individual's question and predicting his or her fate, the second type consists in issuing "morality books" (*shanshu* 善書, lit. "virtuous books") that encompass admonitions, eschatological visions, tales of the netherworld etc. True, most of the

50 Cicero, *Topica* 20:77.

51 Banck, *Das chinesische Tempelorakel*, and the sequel *Das chinesische Tempelorakel*, vol. II.

contemporary “morality books” do not require any decoding and have thus not to be “divined.” This, however, does not apply for many of the texts produced by spirit writing in traditional China, where the community were often confronted with cryptic poetry in the sense described by Bokenkamp. But indeed, we might find here one of the extremely subtle dividing lines between divination and prognostication.

Most authors, including those present in this volume, use the two terms without making a clear-cut distinction between divination and prognostication. However, whereas prognostication is often used as a generic term encompassing all sorts of prediction and forecasting (with the inclusion of modern science), divination can, firstly, refer to questions concerning past, present and future events and is, secondly, often applied for “technical” (in the sense of Cicero’s “artificial”) approaches. Furthermore, the techniques used in divination are meant to unveil the “hidden,” the “occult.” Prophecy is a vital part of prognostication, but in some cases, e.g. spirit-writing, divinatory techniques (beseeching an answer, invoking the deity) are used to make the oracle efficient.

In both East and West, institutionalized religions have a more problematic stance vis-à-vis divinatory predictions than popular religiosity. It may be less their potentially subversive character than the suspicion that diviners arrogate a power of control that ideally speaking should be reserved to the religious clergy. Western medieval debates were concerned with the question of whether it was legitimate to fathom God’s will, but the attitude of Chinese religions went in another direction.

In his contribution, *Fabrizio Pregadio* analyses the multi-faceted perspectives of Daoism with regard to divination. Pregadio focuses on the techniques based on calculation, but his article also encompasses divinatory phenomena, like visualization, that go beyond mere computation. First of all, he presents us with a genealogy of the complicated relation between Daoist religion and mantic arts: “The diviner (who often fashions a ‘rational’ world relying on images and emblems with precise meanings and functions) may be seen as the predecessor of the Daoist master and the Daoist priest – although, as we shall see, this is precisely one of the reasons of the Daoist conflict with divination.” As a consequence of this heritage, we find a large corpus of technical divination in the Daoist canon: texts on hemerology, the *liuren* 六壬 or Six ren Celestial Stems, astrology (“these sources document the incorporation into Chinese astrology of concepts and techniques of Indian origin, and the existence of rites for the expulsion of inauspicious star influences”), topomancy (*fengshui*), physiognomy, meteoromancy and fate-calculation.

Pregadio introduces the respective texts, whose dates of composition cover long periods of time. Despite this seemingly pervasive phenomenon of

Daoist interest in mantic arts, the attitudes vary considerably: in the *Taiping jing* 太平經 (Scripture of great peace), it is the figure of the diviner and the diviner's moral and spiritual excellence that seems to prevail over the techniques: although topomancy, healing methods and calculation according to the Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches do play an eminent role, it is "only proper moral conduct (... that) ensures that one can live for the whole extent of one's destined span."

Even in Confucian literati texts, we rather find verdicts against certain techniques or ignorant charlatans than a wholesale condemnation of the possibility of prediction per se. By examining the opinions about divination of Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–243 or 364), Pregadio shows that Ge Hong dismissed a couple of methods as "inferior arts," "performed merely as a means of predicting the future," but finds those ways laudable that enable us to attain a superior knowledge of the cosmic principles, including, as it is no wonder given his obsession with longevity, the art of extending one's life span. This attitude reminds us of certain literati assessments of mantic arts as "minor ways."⁵²

Pregadio's next section deals with prohibitions of mantic arts. Some of the articles he cites from the fourth and fifth centuries texts remind us vividly of certain articles of the Catholic catechism, with their "you should not" formulae and their invectives against "stupid" activities. Another striking parallel is the interdiction to "rely on spirits and deities to forecast the auspicious and the inauspicious." A compromise that implies a more lenient attitude towards divination can be identified when it comes to healing, where the diviner diagnoses the illness, whereas the Daoist priest "effects the cure."

A mantic technique that comes very close to the Ciceronian "natural" way of divination is what Poul Andersen has called "visionary divination": "Strictly speaking, in fact, they are not techniques of prediction, but different methods characterized by the same purpose: summoning deities and questioning them on various subjects, including the future." Although invoking superior beings for questioning offers some similarities to phenomena described in the contributions by Bokenkamp and Clart, the details of "visionary divination" differ considerably, particularly because of the precise addressees of the invocation.

It remains difficult to answer the question of whether divination is counter-productive to self-cultivation. Unlike Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) who thought that consulting the *Changes* for obtaining an oracle is in fact an act of self-cultivation, it seems that even the most favorable Daoist views on mantic arts ultimately prefer "learning celestial immortality." In this sense, the Daoists' attitude towards mantic practices corresponds to their view on popular

52 See my introduction to *Coping with the Future*.

religion. Just like the Greek god Pan was transformed into a satanic figure by Christianity, the Chinese popular gods became demons; and the diviner a suspicious person.

While there is a certain degree of similarity between Daoist and Buddhist views on divination, we can observe several characteristics unique to Buddhism. *Esther-Maria Guggenmos* opens her contribution with the reluctance of Buddhist mainstream representatives towards mantic arts. However, this is less due to a wholesale denial of the possibility of divining, but it is rather the expression of a spiritual concern for the “pure conduct” that might be disturbed or even prevented by practicing divination. Drawing on numerous biographical collections, Guggenmos describes the ingrained ambiguity that defines Buddhist attitudes from the very beginning of the religion’s dissemination in China. Many sources bear witness to the fact that “supernatural” powers were one of the factors that contributed to the success of monks during the initial stage of Buddhism in China: “Any deliberation about mantic arts in Buddhism will sooner or later elaborate on the concept of supernatural knowledge.” First and foremost, this holds true for the wide range of predictions: “The life of Buddha, his past lives (*jātakas*), but also *sūtra* narrations, or even biographical works – in all these sources experts other than Buddhists, the Buddha himself, or eminent Buddhists prophecise outstanding events,” like “coming spiritual attainments” and, in particular, future Buddhahood.

However, apart from prophetic prediction, a large repertoire of mantic techniques is present in Buddhist life: the choice of an auspicious date for conducting a ritual required astrological knowledge and it was predominantly through Buddhist mediation that Indian astrological concepts made their way to China. Guggenmos gives special attention to the Buddhist version of the “Chinese temple oracle” (see above, Philipp Clart’s contribution) and the even more spiritually oriented dice ritual that has its roots in the sixth-century *Zhancha shan’e yebaojing* 占察善惡業報經 (*Sūtra on the divination of the effect of good and evil actions*): “By dicing one is involved into a spiritual process that shall lead to overcoming doubts and fears regarding one’s karmic burdens and finally intends to result in getting beyond the need for divination itself.” Here, divination is conceived as a tool to overcome divination. But the panoply of arts also includes prediction of a person’s death, dream interpretation, physiognomy, and the reading of omens. In this context, the concern of eminent Buddhists, like Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599–1655), with the *Changes* deserves special attention: “The intellectual examination of this classic is naturally part of the Buddhist tradition and has been repeatedly addressed by Chinese Buddhist scholars.”

To illustrate the constant oscillation between the three options of a) the wholesale rejection of mantic practices, b) the emphasis on non-technical superior (fore)knowledge, and c) the inclination towards certain forms of divination, Guggenmos has chosen an excellent example – the “prince-monk” and missionary An Shigao 安世高 (fl. 148–180). “In none of his predictions does An Shigao announce in detail what will happen, but states his next step of action or gives his colleague a general outlook on the future. His knowledge about future events results from a comprehensive understanding of the effects of karma and it might be the quality of this background knowledge of karmic effects that renders the learning of a concrete mantic technique almost superfluous.” This is the part of superior knowledge, but, at the same time, we are told by his biographer that “neither among the foreign classics and records, nor among the Seven Luminaries, the Five Phases, the medical arts, the obscure arts, up to the sound of birds and tetrapods, was there anything that he did not master.”

Institutionalized religions wish to control mantic practices, but they also cannot completely circumvent the persistent and resilient desire for knowledge of the future, so they have to design strategies to integrate this knowledge. In both Daoism and Buddhism, these strategies vary depending on different forms of spiritual emphasis.

In Chinese history, two periods can be identified as milestones of an extraordinary emergence of novel techniques in mantic arts, the Han (Early Imperial China) and the Song (the beginning of Late Imperial China). Both epochs are also characterized by the thriving of technology, craftsmanship, fine arts, novel forms of literature, concepts of statecraft, and societal organization. And both epochs witnessed the invention or the final taking shape of techniques of prognostication. In her contribution, *Hsien-huei Liao* presents us first with a text written by the controversial statesman and scholar Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086), who laments the omnipresence of diviners in the Northern Song capital of Bian (i.e. Kaifeng). His negative assessment of fortune-telling and fortune-tellers as a threat to what he understood by Confucian ethics may be considered as representative of one variant of the literati’s view on mantic arts. However, Wang’s invectives also imply a certain degree of self-centered disappointment: instead of asking scholars like him for advice, the well-to-do gentry prefer the diviners.

Wang Anshi’s complaints reveal a huge demand for divination on the side of the literati, which was mainly due to the uncertainties with respect to success or failure in the civil state examinations. The steadily increasing proximity between diviners and literati led to an increased knowledge of the other on

both sides: diviners had to become familiar with the details of the examination system and its contents that included a wide range of classical learning, whereas the scholars approached, to certain degrees, the systematic foundations of divinatory techniques. This mutual approximation culminated in erudite diviners (like, for instance, Xu Shouxin 徐守信, 1033–1108) on the one hand, and the rehabilitation of the *Changes* as a book of divination by the philosopher Zhu Xi or the concern with the study of mantic arts of the statesman Wen Tianxiang 文天祥 (1236–83).

The impact of specialists in mantic arts is also reflected by an array of literary laudatory genres: poems, recommendatory prefaces and other kinds of eulogies written by literati expressing their amazement and gratitude towards diviners enhanced the experts' social status: "Such gift writings often matched the diviners' own requests for poetry or writings. No matter who was taking the initiative, the literati's gift writings had a special significance for the diviners. They were proof that the diviners entered the network of literati and gained their approval. They were also an important key to further promote the reputation and expand the pool of literati customers."

To a certain extent, yet with a different rationale, the ambiguity with regards to divination we have observed in Daoism and Buddhism can also be ascertained for the Confucian literati; just like several popes had their court astrologers in spite of the Church's official condemnation of astrology, some Chinese literati expressed their disdain of mantic arts in public while privately consulting fortune-tellers. Again, Wang Anshi is a good example: Liao mentions the fact that "from the existing historical data, we know that he inquired with several people, including Li Shining 李士寧, Xu Shouxin 徐守信, the monk Zhiyuan 智緣, and the monk Huacheng 化成, about his physiognomy and fate. Moreover, his questions not only concerned his own fortune and status, but also the fate of his family members." One may call that behavior hypocritical or even schizophrenic, but such qualifications do not really do justice to its underlying motivations: the expressions of disdain predominantly refer to either the difference between scholars and mantic experts in terms of social status (which implies the jealousy disclosed by Wang's diatribe and the constant suspicion of charlatanerie) or, as Liao points out, seemingly contradicting views on fate.

The archetypal depiction of an encounter between a scholar and a diviner is to be found in the *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji* 史記), where, in company with a courtesan, the famous scholar-poet Jia Yi 賈誼 (200–169 BCE), who can be considered as the embodiment of his period's civilization, meets the diviner Sima Jizhu 司馬季主 on a marketplace: overwhelmed by the profound

cosmological (and mantic) knowledge of Sima Jizhu, Jia Yi pities him for performing a “profession” in such a mean place.⁵³

We find the same fascination with a diviner’s accuracy in Liao’s account of the anecdote about the future emperor Huizong: “When he was still in residence as King Duan 端王, and not yet emperor, he was eager to confirm whether he would be inheriting the throne. He twice sent people to the Daxiangguo Temple to visit the diviners who had booths there (...) However, most of the diviners did not really discuss the envisioned topic. It was not until he (one of the officials Huizong had sent) visited a man named Chen Yan 陳彥, who was in rags and was sitting at the end of all booths, that he got a startling answer: [Chen] Yan said: ‘This cannot be your fate. It has to be the fate of the son of heaven.’ [At this], the official became greatly scared.”

These are the moments when the wisdom of the ancient Sages is re-enacted and can be experienced in the present.

The diviners described by Liao were numerous and omnipresent, maintained close ties to high officials, but were far from being part of an institution. In his contribution, Lingfeng Lü deals with the history of official institutions of divination. Lü focuses on astrological observations, but he also relates the concepts underlying the formative process of these institutions. Starting with the Shang dynasty’s “Grand Diviner” (or “Grand Augur”), the precursor of later officials specialized in divinatory counseling, Lü provides an account of early cosmological theories that served as a vehicle for divination. First tendencies of institutionalizing prognostication can be observed “in the blueprint of the Zhou bureaucratic apparatus, the *Zhouli* 周禮 (Rites of Zhou)”, (which) “divides the astral sciences between the Observer (Fengxiang shi 馮相氏), and the Guardian of the Rules (Baozhang shi 保章氏).” The same work also mentions an official responsible for dream divination.

Besides containing the first mention of certain techniques, like meteoromancy (clouds and vapors) and physiognomy, “the *Zuozhuan* also records that ‘the Son of Heaven has Clerk Officers in charge of observations’ and these officers were responsible for astrology at that time. The establishment of the astrological clerk office in the early time set a paradigm for the later dynasties, and later dynasties had set up professional astrological institutions,” that gradually became “a stable institutional feature.” However, a full-fledged expansion of organizations of expert advice is only attested at the period of the Sui and Tang dynasties.

53 *Shiji*, 127:3215ff.; for an English translation see Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian*, vol. 2, 468–75.

The most authoritative institution for divination in the Sui and Tang dynasties was the official astrology department: "After the year 621, the name of the department in charge of heavenly affairs changed several times, and its affiliation also has been reorganized. This department was very large and there were more than a thousand employees at its peak time during the Tang Dynasty. In 758, the department became independent from the Palace Library and was turned into an independent department of the Tang court. This change had a definite impact on its organization in the Song and Yuan dynasties and even in the Ming and Qing dynasties." It is obvious that such an increase in institutional terms was accompanied (and perhaps fostered) by the composition of a large amount of expert literature, which Lü treats in great detail.

The increasingly osmotic relationship between literati and divination experts described by Liao might have been instrumental for the fact that the Hanlin Academy was given an observatory and that the "Palace Library also set up the Observatory for the Measurement of Armillary Sphere." "Each institution assigned several staff to observe abnormal celestial phenomena every night. These departments in parallel with the Bureau of the Grand Clerk, not only had a fixed staffing establishment, but also were equipped with sophisticated astronomical instruments. The setting of these departments also actually strengthened the activities of astrology, and provided different options for comparison." However, this strengthening went hand in hand with an increasingly severe control of both the transmission of astronomical knowledge and private collections of corresponding instruments – measures that ensured the imperial monopoly. Lü sees a close connection between monopolized knowledge on the one hand and the spread of "unofficial" divination with its manifold techniques on the other hand.

Competition between different specialized institutions of astronomical/astrological observations had since long been a political (and "scientific") principle of verification of results, but it became a characteristic feature under the Yuan dynasty, where three departments (including the Huihui Observatory under the influence of Arab and Persian astronomy) competed.

Within three years of the Ming period (1367–1370), the Institution of astral science was renamed three times with its final designation as Qintian jian 欽天監 (Imperial Astronomical Bureau), a title "which was retained until the end of the Qing period." The former Huihui Astronomical Bureau of the Yuan Dynasty was incorporated into the Imperial Astronomical Bureau as one section. "Besides the above-mentioned institutions in Beijing, there was another Qintian jian institution maintained in Nanjing, the old capital of Ming dynasty. Both institutions in Beijing and Nanjing were responsible for observing abnormal celestial phenomena, calendar making, astrological interpretations, the

observing of the sun, the moon, stars, clouds and so on, so that the officials of both institutions could use divination for date selection, place of the construction, and choice of exact time for court marriage and funeral, etc.” Once again, the production of specialized books accompanied this process, and, although smaller in number in comparison to Song and Yuan dynasty works, the Ming literature displays a tendency towards increasing systematization.

Besides many other contributions by the Jesuit missionaries, their appearance in China also marks a decisive moment in the evolution of the bureaucracy of astral science. “Emperor Chongzhen 崇禎 (r.1628–1644) decided to establish a specific institution in which many Chinese scholars and western missionaries translated and corporately edited western astronomical knowledge, and finally finished the book *Chongzhen lishu* 崇禎曆書 (Calendrical astronomy of the Chongzhen reign).” Lü gives an account of the long-lasting struggle between western missionaries and the different Chinese factions, which eventually ended with the recognition of the superiority of western methods. However, “this victory changed some aspects of the routine works of the Bureau of Astronomy, but it did not change the Chinese assessment of the function of astronomy. In other words, astronomy remained a pragmatic tool for fulfilling the astrological, ritual and political role of the Bureau of Astronomy in the bureaucratic hierarchy centered on the emperor, rather than a branch of knowledge that aimed to explore the real principles of the celestial motions through careful observations as in Europe. Accordingly, astronomical phenomena were still deemed as politically significant portents, although the Western method showed that they actually resulted from regular movements of the celestial bodies.” With the system of the Astronomical Bureau becoming more and more differentiated, responsibilities got increasingly sophisticated: a calendar section (in charge of astronomical calculation), a section of heavenly signs (in charge of the observation of eclipses and meteors), a section of clepsydrae (in charge of the selection of auspicious timing), and the previous section of Arab and Persian astronomy (*huihui ke* 回回科) formed the ensemble of this bureaucratic body. Although the Jesuits pretended to be reluctant to Chinese “superstitions” and were therefore not concerned with divination properly speaking, it is obvious that the task of the Astronomical Bureau consisted in activities that were predominantly related to prognostication.

As control of astral knowledge became looser, the impact of western science grew stronger. “In 1725, the rules concerned with prohibiting studying astronomy privately were deleted officially (...) Since then the Astronomical Bureau was no longer managed as the only legal place to study astronomy and astrology.” This resulted in a fruitful exchange between the professional officials and “free-lance” scholars. Notwithstanding this development, prognostication as

a divinatory explanation of heavenly signs remained important. The punishments provided for concealing celestial and meteorological phenomena or for their misinterpretation attest to the continuity of the belief in the meaning of signs. A good example for the persistence of this belief is the apparition of Harley's comet in 1910, which "agitated the public discussion and disputation of its astrological interpretation with regard to the fate of Emperor Xuantong 宣統. There are novels, poems, drawings, and different kinds of publications on the comet in newspapers, magazines and books."

Few fields of everyday life and theoretical expansion are as closely interwoven with divination as medicine. However, unlike divination, medicine has since long been a privileged topic in Chinese Studies. It is therefore no wonder that there is an abundant literature concerning the relationship between mantic practices and the arts of healing.⁵⁴ In consideration of this vast amount of information, the editors of the present *Handbook* have renounced to the insertion of an unnecessarily redundant chapter on this field. The reader will nonetheless find various mentions of the topic in most part of the contributions to this volume.

In sharp contrast to the field of medicine, the relationship between mantic arts and literature has been neglected to an astonishing degree. So far, the traditional foci of literary studies have not encompassed the – albeit abundant – appearance of divination and diviners in a large number of Chinese literary genres. *Andrew Schonebaum's* contribution remedies to this deplorable situation by concentrating on the most famous novels of traditional China. Although numerous other genres, like poetry, early fiction and drama still remain to be studied, Schonebaum's chapter is an important and substantial first step in exploring this wide subject: "As divinatory practices touch on practically all aspects of life in China in the premodern period, it will not come as a surprise that all genres of literature in China reflect their influence." There is no wonder that the different practices as well as the entire gamut of themes and attitudes we have found in the preceding contributions are manifest in literary works, because "Novels also borrowed from and quoted extensively practical texts – medical handbooks, carpentry, almanacs, divinatory manuals, and almost every other guide to daily life."

In the *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji* 西遊記) we find the Buddhist idea of a special kind of foreknowledge: "The implication throughout the novel is not

54 To quote just a few titles: Harper, "Physicians and Diviners," 91–110; Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*; Lo and Cullen, *Medieval Chinese Medicine*; Unschuld and Zheng, *Chinese Traditional Healing*; Raphals, "Divination and Medicine in China and Greece," 78–103.

that divination is not a true art, but rather that divination is a set of practices that the unenlightened use to predict the future. Those who are truly wise and powerful, such as Buddha, have ‘foreknowledge without divination,’ and they are depicted in sharp contrast to petty fortune-tellers on the marketplace.

Many more facets of prognostication are illustrated in *The Story of the Stone* (aka *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢), which “features characters who have otherworldly sight and knowledge of the future, but that novel consistently asserts that while divinatory techniques can produce accurate data about the future, one has to be a sensitive reader to make use of it”. One is tempted to say that the very comprehension of the novel requires a divinatory reading, a kind of immersing oneself (“Einleben”) through an act of divination (“ahnden”) as outlined by Schleiermacher. No wonder that poems often play a decisive role in foreshadowing future events. “If oracles, like fiction, required a sensitive sort of reading, it is curious that one of *Stone*’s most famous commentators felt (remarkably) that *Stone* was itself an oracle (...) the extent to which Zhang (Xinzhi, fl. 1828–1850) believed the author of *Stone* encoded it with the meanings and structures of the *Yijing* is remarkable. In his view, the novel was not just structured by the philosophical worldview of the *Yijing*, but reflective of the structure of the universe.”

In this novel, we are facing skepticism (mainly with regard to charlatans, but also as a general device: “Without skepticism there would be fatalism”) as well as the concept of a sign in the present that is foreshadowing future events; this is, of course, one of the foundational prerequisites of all divination. Moreover, the *Story of the Stone* depicts conflicting interpretations of a sign: the distinct techniques may have been precise on their own terms, but “it were the interpretations that led to false conclusions.”

The novel that perhaps contains a maximum of signs and their reading is the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義) with Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181–234) as its protagonist for the arts (and gifts) of foreseeing, predicting and strategic divining (techniques that partly involve the wide range of military divination): “He is a man of profound understanding, not just of military tactics and developments, but of a profound moral rightness and also of arcane and mantic arts. Zhuge is able to consult the *Book of Changes* and observe celestial phenomena in order to predict the future. His powers are not solely prognosticatory however, his wisdom and moral power enable him to effect change even on the weather.” In the case of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, we can also observe the enormous repercussions of fiction for the religious realm: “The novel, having created an image of Zhuge Liang as a master of mantic arts, led to his apotheosis in the public imaginary, leading back to even more mythologized acts in subsequent stories, as the object of

worship of many temples and shrines, and as a door god.” And let us remind that another protagonist of the novel, the general Guan Yu 關羽, has become one of the patrons, if not *the* patron saint of the temple oracle throughout the Chinese-speaking world.

Plum in the Golden Vase (*Jinpingmei* 金瓶梅) “takes a complicated stance toward prognostication. While it foreshadows the various fates of the primary characters via fortune-telling, it repeatedly speaks directly to the reader about the immutability of fate.” *Plum in the Golden Vase* attests to the sedimentation of fatalism in early seventeenth century – although numerous sorts of divination are present in this novel (e.g. physiognomic techniques, iatromancy, horoscopy), there is apparently no way to negotiate with fate. Buddhist views on fate and the skepticism of Xunzi 荀子 (ca. 310–235 BCE) seem to have amalgamated. The novel’s characters may show a skeptical attitude towards these arts, but, given their mostly depraved moral behavior, skepticism is precisely one of the factors why their fate will not be altered.

Illness is one of the phenomena that imperatively require divinatory prognosis. “As in other domestic novels, divination is taken seriously when a character is ill.” This is true for the *Story of the Stone*, but we find it already – and in a fairly large quantity – in *Plum in the Golden Vase*. Schonebaum provides a detailed account of a variety of iatromantic methods, like, for instance “Emolument and horse”: “The fiction that depicts that practice, was a way of ordering the chaos of contemporary medical practice. With differing doctors giving different diagnoses and prescriptions, it made sense to have a fixed way to determine the outcome of the disease.” However, since the novel *au fond* portrays a decline, the outcome of such prognostications (which should not be confused with diagnosis) is basically always fated. “But more often, and more poignantly, fiction reminds readers of the limits of reading. That is, even if we divine correctly, and interpret the signs or images or texts that are produced during divination, there is still the matter of whimsy and the inscrutability of human behavior.”

A large number of divinatory techniques are being practiced down to the present day, including those based on inspiration. *Stéphanie Homola* gives a detailed account of the living tradition of mantic arts in the Chinese-speaking world. In a first section she “examines the terminology and classification of present-day techniques and practices.” In order to get an impression of continuity and discontinuity of these arts, the reader is invited to compare the current expressions with Kalinowski’s outline of categories in traditional China.

In her analysis, Homola adopts the twofold manifestation of divination and points to differences and commonalities between its inspired (the Ciceronian “natural”) and inductive (the “artificial”) forms. The respective practitioners,

though, disengage from each other: “*Shushu* masters denigrate mediums as irrational and are eager to draw a clear line between them. Mediums, on their side, derogate mantic arts specialists whose knowledge can be learned by anyone in books, whereas they themselves rely on unique spiritual gifts granted by divinities. However, mediums commonly use mantic arts in combination with inspired divination, although this topic has been little studied.”

One may disagree with the view, quite widespread among anthropologists, which groups the “temple oracle” with its divining blocks under the category of inspired divination (given the absence of a medium, who is the inspired one in this case?), but the interesting point raised by Homola is the fact, that, apart from traditional techniques and their classifications, western forms of prediction like Tarot and astrology have made their way to the Far Eastern repertoire. On the traditional side, we still have the various methods connected to the *Changes*, *fengshui* topomancy, the consultation of the almanac, horoscopy based on the Eight Characters (*bazi* 八字), the analysis of written characters (“glyphomancy”), physiognomy, and dream divination. However, there seem to be more all-embracing generic terms for the practitioners of these arts: “fate-calculation” (*suanming*), “casting a hexagram” (*suangua*), and “specialist of the principles of fate” (*minglia jia*) for experts of horoscopy. At the same time, there is a rediscovery of techniques fallen into oblivion, like the *Ziwei doushu* 紫微斗數 (numbers according to Ziwei [star] and the Plough) method.

A second section is devoted to the clients of divinatory practices. With changing percentages, surveys in mainland China (where most of these practices are situated in a grey zone, oscillating between the ideologically laden concepts of “science” and “superstition”) still attest to a relatively widespread trust in certain techniques. Situation is different in Taiwan, where we find, for instance (as of 1995), an overwhelming conviction that the choice of an auspicious day for a wedding is of crucial importance. These statistical figures notwithstanding, Homola makes clear that there remain a lot of unanswerable questions if we solely rely on surveys.

Consequently, anthropological in-depth studies shed more light on the expert-client relationship: Divination as a sort of psychological (even “pastoral”) care, the role of women as both experts and clients, and, of course, the impact of the status of mantic arts depending on the general political climate.

In a third section, Homola provides an overview of the historical vicissitudes of mantic arts in mainland China and Taiwan. Whereas their status in the – officially atheist – People’s Republic depends on the often arbitrary interpretation of ambiguous clauses in legislation, their development in Taiwan offers a rather spectacular scenario: although their position and possible evolution under Japanese rule is still waiting to be fully explored, we can observe that

there was a considerable shift in their assessment, from the rather skeptical if not negative evaluation under the National Party *Guomintang* after their emigration to Taiwan in 1949 to their becoming an important part of “Taiwanese culture” by the end of the 1980s, which was, of course, facilitated by the – tolerated, but not favored – presence of exiled experts from the mainland.

In her last section, Homola addresses the issue of the social status of divination experts. Quite similar to Liao’s description of Song dynasty conditions, we find both the petty “marketplace fortune-tellers” and the high-browed experts with their posh offices and well-to-do clientele. Another continuity is to be seen in the appreciation of amateurs, who are not interested in remuneration for their service. And there is the age-old question of transmission: are “do-it-yourself” books that already appeared in Late Imperial China a proper medium for mastering the arts? Can they replace the teaching of a master? How should one learn the principles and details of the various methods? In present-day Taiwan, there are classes for teaching mantic arts, some of them even held in universities, whereas the master-student relationship still seems to prevail in the mainland.

Studies on contemporary issues are often more explicit in naming the lacunae that still have to be filled. Homola provides some examples: “Thus, we lack case studies on many mantic techniques which may not be mainstream but are still practiced by many people in the Chinese world, as well as on many others which have not been identified by scholars yet. Such studies may reveal regional aspects which are usually underestimated in the field, as well as interesting processes of knowledge circulation and adaptation to contemporary issues.”

“Second (...) there is a lack of systematic inquiries, specific case studies, and large-scaled studies that go beyond journalistic inquiries on a series of social issues: divination & politics: it is well known how the influence of fortune-tellers and *fengshui* practitioners over some Communist Party officials has led the Party to reinforce bans on superstitions and carry out regular crackdowns on practitioners. However, the Party does promote a ‘culture of luck’ (*jixiang wenhua* 吉祥文化) in state-controlled temples and did seek a form of legitimacy when choosing an auspicious date to launch the Olympics in Beijing; divination & earthquake prediction.”

And there is the question of continuity, particularly with regard to mainland China: “was it enough to break transmission lines? Or can this rather short period of strict restriction account for the revival of mantic arts in China after 1979?” And, finally, “further research and surveys should be led on the classifications of mantic arts in libraries and bookstores, as well as on the terminology used in publications related to mantic arts, such as *juexue* 絕學 (rare/lost science) or *xuanxue* 玄學 (mysterious science).”

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Introduction to Thought and Mantic Arts

Zhao Lu

1 Introduction

Mantic arts would not be possible without the mental activities through which human beings perceive the future. In addition, our understanding of the world shapes mantic arts and our ways of interacting with them. Therefore, this second introduction will address the special role our “ideas” about mantic arts play in studying divination. It will not survey the vast number of ideas in mantic practices, but pinpoint previous scholarship that has dealt with Chinese thought, mantic arts, and especially interactions between the two. In addition, we will also look at how previous scholarship evaluates and conceptualizes mantic arts. Having sketched a big picture of the scholarship, this chapter will also attempt to point out how works on thought and mantic arts have been and will be responding to general research questions in fields like the history of science and intellectual history in ancient China. We hope that it will give order to what is at first glance an incoherent and dispersed field of “ideas.”

As far as thought and mantic arts are concerned, we can heuristically divide the previous scholarship into two directions: thought *in* mantic arts, and thinking *about* mantic arts. The first often deals with concepts that have been well established in the field of Chinese intellectual history, such as the concept of the Five Phases (*wuxing* 五行) or fate (*ming* 命). The second kind focuses on reflections on mantic practices, ranging from imperial Chinese literati’s views on divination to the rationality that is reflected in divination. We will start with the former kind, and then proceed to cover the latter, which is less clearly defined, but more significant for the history of mantic arts.

2 Thought in Mantic Arts

This type of scholarship is rooted in Chinese intellectual history. One standard treatment has been locating certain concepts in mantic practices and elaborating on them, and these concepts have often been well researched in the field of Chinese intellectual history. For example, the following are routinely mentioned: the theories of *qi*, *yin-yang*, and the Five Phases, the sequence of the

Heavenly Stems (*tiangan* 天干) and Earthly Branches (*dizhi* 地支), the cosmology based on the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes, hereafter *Changes*, and celestial skies. This section will review the scholarship on these topics and contextualize them in the study of mantic arts.

2.1 Qi, Yin-yang, and the Five Phases

These three sets of concepts have been the pillars of Chinese people's world-views from second century BCE to today. The ether-like *qi* and its binary *yin* and *yang* features serve as the foundation for Chinese cosmogony and cosmology. The various relationships between the five phases or elements, Fire, Water, Metal, Wood, and Earth serve to relate the natural world as well as to explain political changes. Joseph Needham treated them as the fundamental ideas of Chinese science.¹ John Henderson takes them as the substance of Chinese correlative thinking, which had a great impact on Chinese intellectual history.² A.C. Graham, Nathan Sivin, and John Major have further illustrated the significance of these three concepts and put them on the map in Western-language scholarship.³

It is only natural that discussion of *qi*, *yin-yang*, and the Five Phases also takes place in the study of divination. Richard J. Smith's *Fortune-Tellers and Philosophers: Divination in Traditional Chinese Society* introduces these concepts before diving into various forms of divination in Qing China. Stephen L. Field's *Ancient Chinese Divination: Dimensions of Asian Spirituality* and more recently Xing Wang's *Physiognomy in Ming China* provides a similar treatment of the concepts.⁴ Both works bring the studies of cosmology into the context of mantic techniques and provide sufficient prerequisite knowledge for understanding divination.

2.2 Cosmologies in the Book of Changes

The cosmological systems based on the *Book of Changes* are closely related to *qi*, *yin-yang*, and the Five Phases, and they often receive more detailed descriptions in studies on mantic arts. Originally a divination text, the *Book of Changes* was the crossroad between divination and Chinese thought throughout imperial China. In particular, Han dynasty scholars read the trigrams and

1 As Needham named one of his chapters in his *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 2, *History of Scientific Thought*, 216–345.

2 Henderson, *Development and Decline*, 27–46.

3 See for example, Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*; Lloyd and Sivin, *The Way and the Word*; and Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought*.

4 Smith, *Fortune-Tellers and Philosophers*, 49–91; Field, *Ancient Chinese Divination*, 7–20; and Xing Wang, *Physiognomy in Ming China*, 118–38.

hexagrams as markers of *qi* at specific moments of a year, representing the particular proportion of *yin* and *yang*. Song dynasty scholars not only used the symbols to further explain the cosmogonic process, but also extracted general principles of the world from the text. Parallel to these philosophical inquiries, the *Changes* was used as a main form of divination by people of all social strata. It further inspired other forms of divination.⁵

The official status of the *Changes* as a Confucian classic since the Han dynasty and its popularity made the *Changes* very distinctive, especially as a research topic, or more precisely, a research field. Certain scholarly societies, institutes, and journals are specifically devoted to the study of the *Changes*, such as the Center for *Zhouyi* and Ancient Chinese Philosophy (*Zhouyi yanjiu zhongxin* 周易研究中心) at Shandong University, and their journal *Zhouyi yanjiu* 周易研究 (*Zhouyi studies*). Many monographs and articles are devoted to the *Changes*, such as Richard Smith's *Fathoming the Cosmos and Ordering the World: The Yijing (I-Ching, or Classic of Changes) and Its Evolution in China*, Bent Nielsen's *A Companion to Yi Jing Numerology and Cosmology*, and Willard J. Peterson's "Making Connections: 'Commentary on the Attached Verbalizations of the *Book of Changes*,'" just to name a few.

The majority of these works emphasize the philosophical and cosmological side of the *Changes*, while the divinatory part has been less studied. One of the main reasons is that Chinese intellectual history, just like history of philosophy, has been focused on intellectual giants and systematic philosophical systems, especially in elite circles. Based on this research premise, the divinatory role of the *Changes* can hardly find a place because the mantic arts have been treated as rejected knowledge and a testament to "Chinese" irrationality.⁶ This imbalance resulted in an imbalance in our knowledge on the *Changes*: while we have well studied the cosmological systems in the *Changes*, how people specifically practiced the *Changes* as a divinatory method remains somewhat opaque.⁷

In recent years, scholars have been more and more interested in minor intellectuals and knowledge that was on the periphery of the intellectual world. Many works focus on how diviners used the *Changes* as a divination manual.

5 This is the case ranging from early Chinese divinations like "Shi fa" 筮法 to the many divination techniques in Dunhuang, which are often related to the *Changes*, then to "Meihua yishu" 梅花易數 in late imperial China. See Cook and Zhao, *Stalk Divination*; Smith, *Fortune-Tellers and Philosophers*; and Wang, *Dunhuang zhanbu wenxian*.

6 This is especially the case in Communist China and is still more than visible now. See this attitude in articles like: Guo, "Yijing yu Yisuan," 79–82; Sun and Li, "Lun Yijing de renwen jingshen," 62–67. For the debates of rationality, see later in this chapter.

7 For example, most of the information about the *Yijing* method comes from the Tang and Song dynasty, but we have little idea about the methods before the Tang dynasty.

Smith's *Fortune-Tellers & Philosophers* again exemplifies this trend: in the book, he first explains the foundational elements and general principles of the *Changes* divination, and then looks into how it was practiced in the Qing dynasty in various social strata. *The Other Yijing* edited by Hon Tze-ki is a more recent example to bring the *Changes* into mantic practice and social life.⁸ These works switch our scholarly gaze of the *Changes* from a grand intellectual scheme to mantic practices in daily life.

2.3 *Celestial and Calendric Signs*

Celestial and calendric signs are another set of elements that have dominated the daily lives of Chinese societies. Calendric markers such as the ten Heavenly Stems (*tiangan* 天干) and twelve Earthly Branches (*dizhi* 地支) formed the sexagenary system to count for dates. Celestial skies not only served as a natural compass; the stars were also believed to have divine power, which inspired numerous forms of religious worship, such as that of the Big Dipper (*Beidou* 北斗). The systematic observation of the sky goes back to third millennium BCE, and remained a battlefield for imperial legitimacy and court politics throughout traditional China.

The traditions of Chinese astrology and calendar making have long attracted historians of science. In 1959, Needham devoted more than 300 pages of *Science and Civilisation in China* to Chinese astronomy. Nathan Sivin has worked on mathematical astronomy in Early China (1969) as well as calendric systems in Ming China (2009). Edward H. Schafer has explored celestial beings in Tang dynasty astronomy and poetry (1977), and Xiaochun Sun and Jacob Kistemaker have examined the celestial skies in the Han dynasty (1997). More recently, Christopher Cullen (2016) and Daniel Morgan (2017) have comprehensively studied the calendric systems in early imperial China.⁹ Responding to the history of science communities, these works tend to focus on the astronomical and calendric parts of the Chinese arts of the skies.

More than just recording of time, studies of Heavenly patterns in China mainly were means of seeing the future and understanding Heaven's will. They corresponded to "astrology" as in the European medieval context, where the word indicated both astronomy and astrology in their modern senses.¹⁰

8 Redmond and Hon, *Teaching the I Ching*, 19–36; 158–70; Hon ed., *The Other Yijing*.

9 Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 3, *Mathematics and the Sciences of the Heavens and Earth*; Sivin, *Cosmos and Computation*; Sivin, *Granting the Seasons*; Schafer, *Pacing the Void*; Sun and Kistemaker, *Chinese Sky During the Han*; Cullen, *The Foundations of Celestial Reckoning*, and Morgan, *Astral Sciences in Early Imperial China*.

10 See, for example, Jiang, *Xingzhan xue yu chuantong wenhua*, esp. 62–76, 164–94. For the situation in Europe, see Rutkin, "Astrology," 541–61.

Throughout imperial China, astrology served political ends. This is well documented by various scholars. In 1990, Chang Chia-feng 張嘉鳳 and Huang Yi-long 黃一農 used a computer simulation program to show that political motivations could trump astronomical observations in astrological reading. In Chen Jiu-jin's 陳久金 2007 work, he introduces various astrological principles with real examples from imperial China. Most of them deal with nobles, high officials, and emperors.¹¹

Astrology as direct observations of the skies was only one kind of divination that used celestial and calendric signs; two more kinds are worth mentioning here. The first one corresponds the signs, especially that of Heavenly Stems and Earthly branches, with a series of auspicious and inauspicious signs, such as the Jianchu 建除 system.¹² In this way, certain times are assigned certain degrees of auspiciousness. Many of these kinds of divination came from Early China, and were labeled as "day books" (*rishu* 日書). Additionally, in almanacs through imperial China, it is common to find this practice of assigning certain auspicious or ominous characters to certain days (such as: it is auspicious to get married on such and such day). The second kind of divination is technically similar to the first kind, but it often corresponds calendric signs with celestial signs through multiple coding processes. These are often labelled as "board divination" (*shizhan* 式占) by modern scholars. The applications of board divination range from personal horoscopes to weather forecasts and military campaigns.¹³

In recent scholarship, both kinds of divination have received considerable attention. For example, Marc Kalinowski has worked intensively on the interaction between calendar making, astrology, and cosmology. He and Donald Harper co-edited a comprehensive survey on the daybooks of Early China.¹⁴ In his *Chinese Mathematical Astrology*, Ho Peng-Yoke works on the three pillars of board divination: the method of *Taiyi* deity (*Taiyi* 太乙), Mysterious Gates Escaping Techniques (*qimen dunjia* 奇門遁甲), and the art of the six Ren (*liu Ren* 六壬). Besides introducing the methods and their applications, Ho also elaborates on the loaded vocabulary of these methods and their implications.¹⁵

11 Chang and Huang, "Zhongguo gudai tianwen," 361–78. Chen, *Diwang de xingzhan*.

12 For an introduction to the Jianchu system, see Loewe, "Almanacs (jih-shu) from Shui-hu-ti," 1–27.

13 Ho, "Taiyi shushu," 383–413; and Ho, "Qimen dunjia yu tianqi yuce," 339–47. For more information, see also his *Chinese Mathematical Astrology*.

14 Kalinowski, "Xian Qin suili wenhua," 5–22; Kalinowski, "Use of the Twenty-Eight *xiu*," 55–81; Kalinowski, "Astrologie calendaire," 71–113; Kalinowski, "Les instruments astro-calendériques," 309–419. Harper and Kalinowski, *Books of Fate and Popular Culture*.

15 See Ho, *Chinese Mathematical Astrology*, 12–35.

2.4 Fate and Mandate

If the aforementioned concepts tend to enter divinatory manuals as building blocks, concepts like “fate” and “mandate” could affect the conception of divination in a more general way. These concepts receive great attention particularly in the field of intellectual history. For example, *The Magnitude of Ming* edited by Christopher Lupke provides a full range exploration on the concepts of mandate, fate, and destination, all of which surround the Chinese character *ming* 命. The book covers almanacs, religious practices, and literary works, dating from Early China right up to twentieth century China.¹⁶ Outside of this edited volume, numerous articles have discussed the concept of fate from early Chinese philosophy to modern Chinese folk ideology.¹⁷

Philosophical elaborations on concepts like fate are rich, and they often lead to further questions. For example, is fate changeable? Depending on the answer, we would encounter a cluster of concepts such as destination, predestination, and fatalism. If we ask how ubiquitous fate is, then we will meet another cluster of concepts: contingency, randomness, and free will. If we expand fate from individual to a society or a nation, we will face concepts like the mandate of Heaven, apocalypse, and eschatology. Many of these concepts intertwine with each other. And furthermore, the very words we use here, such as “fate” and “destiny” have their own traditions in Western cultures, and in many cases, they are not fully compatible with the concepts in Chinese traditions. All these situations fuel discussions on basic philosophical terminology, especially in the field of comparative philosophy.¹⁸

Moving forward from the current research, there are at least three directions of looking at thought *in* mantic art. First, beyond the cosmological and calendric terms, divinatory manuals are still rich with terminologies that might have been borrowed from certain intellectual traditions. The terms might come from well-studied traditions such as Buddhism; obscure, local beliefs; or simply be original to the divinatory manuals.¹⁹ Tracing down the terms and categorizing them could help us better understand the roles of intellectual tenets

16 Lupke, *Magnitude of Ming*.

17 For example, see Hsu, “Concept of Predetermination and Fate,” 51–56; Harrell, “Concept of Fate,” 90–109; Chen, “Concept of Fate in Mencius,” 495–520; Chen, “Confucius’ View of Fate,” 323–59; Perkins, “Moist Criticism of the Confucian Use of Fate,” 421–36; Raphals, “Fate, Fortune, Chance, and Luck,” 537–74; Li, “Xian Qin zongfa shehui jiegou xia zhi mingyun guan,” 23–42. This list is by no means exhaustive.

18 Many of the works from the previous note are comparative by nature. Also see Raphals, “Fate, Fortune, Chance, and Luck”; and Raphals, “Fatalism, Fate, and Stratagem”; Tiwald, “Confucianism and Virtue Ethics,” 55–63.

19 We can see this range of terminology in “Stalk Divination” (“Shifa” 筮法). See Cook and Zhao, *Stalk Divination*, 29–46. Similarly, the pantheon mentioned in *Moxishouluo bu* 摩醯首羅 卜 (The divination of Maheśvara) shows a mixture of well-known deities and more

in divination. In the chapter by Richard Smith, we will further see how cosmological concepts were integrated into mantic methods through Chinese history. On the other hand, Constance A. Cook's chapter will explore more local and obscure traditions from excavated divination manuals of Early China.

Second, since the concept of fate is intimately related to mantic arts, it is worth further exploring how this concept has manifested in and influenced mantic arts, and vice versa, both on the theoretical and practical level. For example, *Moxishouluo bu* 摩醯首羅卜 (The divination of Maheśvara) from ninth century Dunhuang comforts its clients by saying that chanting the name of the Buddha or the Three Treasure could save them from future disasters. The text does not make this type of statement in the introduction, but puts it in the entries of the inauspicious results as instructions. In other words, the text not only assumes a changeable fortune, but also integrates it into the practice of divination, recommending the recitation of the Buddha name to the recipients of inauspicious results.²⁰

Third, in many cases, certain terms and concepts change their meanings in the mantic context. Taking board divination as an example, the celestial and calendric signs function as arithmetic elements in a computational process, instead of the signifiers of celestial beings in real time observation. In *Ziwei doushu* 紫微斗數 (Numbers According to Ziwei and the Plough), for example, how stars are linked to a person has little to do with the celestial skies at the time when that person was born; they result from translating the birth time into several sequences, including Heavenly Stems, Earthly Branches, and celestial signs.²¹ The use of the celestial signs then opens an intriguing research question: since the celestial signs are only place holders and can be substituted by another set of signs, what is the intellectual motivation for using the celestial signs? Questions like this could help us better see mantic arts as an active participant of the intellectual world instead of just a recipient.²²

3 Thinking about Mantic Arts

If we move from the intellectual components in mantic arts to the agencies around mantic arts, we will enter the realm of how people reflect on mantic

obscure ones that are possibly local to Dunhuang. See Dotson, Cook, and Zhao, *Dice and Gods on the Silk Road*, 96–107.

20 Dotson, Cook, and Zhao, *Dice and Gods on the Silk Road*, 107–25.

21 This method is studied in Ho's *Chinese Mathematical Astrology*, 74–82, and more thoroughly in his "Ziwei doushu," 28–50.

22 We can find the appropriation of cosmological terms in physiognomy manuals. See Xing Wang, *Physiognomy in Ming China*, 112–46.

arts. The first, and most common theme in this realm is how ancient Chinese people evaluate prognosticative practices, ranging from Wang Chong 王充 (27–97 CE) to Yan Fu 嚴復 (1854–1921). Some of them might completely dismiss the efficacy of mantic arts, while others were enthusiastic believers. No matter what stances they took, many of them gave their own reasoning. The examinations of this reasoning thus form one kind of scholarship, especially in Chinese intellectual and cultural history.

If we look at how people have thought about mantic arts as traditions or groups of techniques, we have the second theme: the classification of mantic techniques. The most common focus of this theme is the bibliographical categories in state-sponsored works such as dynastic histories or the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (Complete library of the four treasures) in imperial China. Besides the imperial Chinese scholars, modern scholars have also categorized mantic arts in ways that go along with their analytical purposes. Put differently, the point of this theme is how to understand the historical and technical relationship between various mantic arts.

If we go beyond the technical parts and ask about the mentalities behind them, we will have the third theme: ways of thinking as reflected in mantic arts. Scholarship in the history of science has been asking this question in various ways in recent decades. The old but still oft-mentioned question is whether divination is rational. Depending on the answer, we often have a characterization of ancient Chinese people; either they were inferior to us, or they were the same as us, or they were equal to but categorically different from us. Linked to rationality, another oft-asked question is whether mantic arts were science, the answers to which hinge on what “science” means. Aside from intelligence, if we focus on emotions, we can also see what psychological needs mantic arts fill.

In this section, we will start with the evaluation of mantic arts, and then move on to the classifications of mantic arts. We will end the section with the debate of rationality as reflected in mantic arts. Unlike the concepts from the previous sections, these three themes are very specific to mantic arts, and they constitute a large part of scholarship on them, especially on a comparative scale. The aim here is to point out what previous scholarship has achieved. And following the scholarly trends, we will be able to identify certain unsolved issues. Cross-cultural and interdisciplinary comparisons come in handy here; in many cases, scholars who work on Ancient Greek or Medieval European divination might have provided solutions to the questions that Chinese studies scholars have raised. The ultimate goal is to bring together previously scattered studies on Chinese mantic arts, and try to look at them from a global perspective.

3.1 *Evaluating the Mantic Arts*

Evaluations of mantic arts are not new in China. The action of verifying divinatory results can be traced back to oracle bone inscriptions in the late Shang (ca. 1200–1045 BCE). Discussions about divination appear occasionally in pre-Qin texts. Chinese literati mentioned their views on mantic arts in various writings through imperial China. It is in fact hard to find a time period when people were not interested in judging mantic arts. Three time periods particularly attract modern scholars: Early China, the Ming dynasty, and the republican era.

Early China, particularly the Warring States period has been an axis for intellectual history. Since the beginning of twentieth century, early Chinese thinkers like Confucius, Mozi, Han Feizi, etc. have been compared to ancient Greek philosophers, and hence have been considered representative of Chinese thought. Among Warring States thinkers, Xunzi receives much attention because of his complete dismissal of physiognomy as well as his rejection of Heaven's will. However, because Xunzi's view on physiognomy is closely linked to his philosophical system, it is rarely discussed separately.²³ Among Han dynasty literati, Wang Chong attracts special interest, because of his systematic evaluation of contemporary mantic practices, ranging from astrology to physiognomy. Moreover, because many Han dynasty records on the reasoning behind mantic arts are lost, Wang Chong's evaluations provide a peek into his own analytic style as well the Han society's attitudes toward divination by and large.²⁴

When it comes to Medieval China, the relevant primary sources become abundant, and accordingly, scholarship has chosen even more illustrative cases. For example, Liao Hsien-huei 廖咸惠 has worked on the famous Song scholar Wen Tianxiang's 文天祥 (1236–1283) views on divination; Lai Xisan 賴錫三 explores Shen Kuo's 沈括 (1031–1095) reflections on mantic arts. These figures are chosen because their cases could be linked to bigger discourses in

23 Machle, "Xunzi as a Religious Philosopher," 25–27; Goldin, "Xunzi and Early Han Philosophy," 149, 162.

24 Michael Loewe has a useful survey on Han literati's evaluation and criticism on mantic arts. See his *Divination, Mythology and Monarchy*, 168–75. For Han literati's attitudes toward physiognomy, see Chu, *Handai de xiangren shu*, 160–71; Puett, "Listening to Sages," 271–81; Kalinowski, "Wang Chong sixiang zhong de mingyun yu zhanbu," 277–86. Kalinowski has also translated Wang Chong's writing about mantic arts into French in his *Wang Chong, Balance des discours*. For a systematic survey on Wang Chong's evaluation on mantic arts, see Yang, "Wang Chong *Lunheng* zhi shushu guan tanxi." Also see Gentz, "Wang Chongs (27–ca. 100) Divinationskritik," 259–74.

intellectual history and history of science. From the Ming dynasty to modern days, Wen Tianxiang has been depicted as a cultural hero who was loyal and unyielding to foreign invasions.²⁵ He appears as a paragon of Chinese literati and an apologist for Confucian values. During the last years of his life, Wen hid from the Mongol armies' clutches, and thus constantly ruminated on the issue of fate. Because literati in imperial China often distanced themselves from mantic arts especially in their writing, Wen's case proves that the literati actually did practice mantic arts. Shen Kuo in the twentieth century, on the other hand, has been considered as a precursor to modern scientists. Therefore, his interest in mantic arts has been interpreted to show paths to science and even to modernity that are alternative to the Western ones.²⁶

When it comes to scholarship on late imperial China and the Republican period, scholars tend to explore how the evaluation of mantic arts is linked to Western knowledge.²⁷ For example, Chu Ping-Yi has shown that in the seventeenth-century, under Jesuit influences, Chinese Christian communities reevaluated mantic arts under Jesuit standards of "superstition," which indicated beliefs and practices that did not meet their Christian expectations.²⁸ Xiong Yuezhi, on the other hand, has pointed out that while many literati such as Yan Fu and Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929) from the turn of the twentieth century promoted Western science and condemned mantic arts, in their personal lives, they still practiced divination on daily basis.²⁹ If Xiong shows the discrepancy between the literati's thought and practice, Lan Bo has studied how diviners as well as scholars attempted to mash mantic arts into the category of modern science.³⁰ All these works focus on the tension between Chinese mantic arts and Western knowledge, especially what was considered science at the time.

People's intellectual views on divination has social impacts. In traditional China, the views affected the social status of the diviners, their income and livelihood, and their interaction with the rest of the society by and large. In order to further illustrate the continuum from intellectual world to the social

25 Certainly, the meaning of "country" and "foreign" is different from time to time.

26 For Wen Tianxiang, see Liao, "Exploring the Mandates of Heaven," 299–344. For Shen Kuo, see Sivin, "Shen Kuo," 1–55, esp. 11 and fn 10. Also see Lai, "*Mengxi biyan* 'Xiangshu' men zhong de *xiangshu* yu *huanzhong*," 121–44.

27 This does not mean that interactions with Western knowledge are the only focus; see for example, Gong Baoli's 宮寶利 many works: "Qingdai guanshen shushu huodong tanxi," 43–47; "Qingdai shushu huodong dui jiating shenghuo de yingxiang," 27–31; and *Shushu huodong yu mingqing shehui*.

28 Chu, "Piwang xingmi," 695–752.

29 Xiong, "Jindai Zhongguo dushuren de mingli shijie," 147–60.

30 Lan, "Zhongguo chuantong xiangxue jiqi jindaihua zhuanxing."

world, Liao Hsien-huei in this volume will introduce how the Song dynasty literati perceived divination and diviners. She shows how the literati's perceptions of divination and their interactions with the diviners during the time of growing urbanization and commercialization. In the same vein, Stéphanie Homola's chapter will survey individual and institutional attitudes towards mantic practices in contemporary day Mainland China and Taiwan, and how these attitudes reify in daily life.

3.2 *Classifying the Mantic Arts*

Classification can be seen a specific way of thinking about mantic arts. In imperial Chinese texts, especially dynastic histories, the classifications often appear in the bibliographical treatises. Among these texts, the "Yiwen zhi 藝文志" (Treatise of arts and texts) of the *Han shu* 漢書 (Book of Han) from the first century CE and the *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* 四庫全書總目提要 (Annotated catalogue of the complete imperial library) from 1798 CE are of significance because they systematically classify various mantic texts and elaborate on the rationales behind their classifications. The categories in the "Treatise of Arts and Texts" also became the bibliographical precedent for later imperial Chinese texts including the *Annotated Catalogue*.³¹

The classifications first of all reveal how imperial Chinese literati treated what we call "mantic arts," the arts of predicting the future through divination or prophecy. Take "Treatise of Arts and Texts" for example, what we call mantic arts is under the category of the "arts of calculation" (*shushu* 數術).³² While most of the items in this category coincide with our modern definition of mantic arts, a few do not, such as calendric charts (*lipu* 曆譜). This discrepancy is due to the fact that many calendric charts were used to make divinations in imperial China. Moreover, in the "Treatise of Arts and Texts," there are many mantic techniques that are not listed under "arts of calculation," but under the "military experts" (*bingjia* 兵家), such as the observation of *qi* to predict the movement of the enemy.³³ Also, while the *Shanhai jing* 山海經 (Classic of mountains and seas) is classified under "arts of calculation," there is no trace

31 For the two bibliographical works and their relationships, see Kalinowski, "Technical Traditions in Ancient China," 223–48.

32 The connotations of *shu* 數 are extremely rich, ranging from number, calculation, and method, to chance and fate. Here I translate it as "calculation" only in order to emphasize that *shushu* indicate certain calculations to know the future. For a thorough survey on "Yiwen zhi" and Han dynasty prognostication, see Kalinowski, "Divination and Astrology," 339–66. Also see Loewe, "Religious and Intellectual Background," 673–78; and Loewe, *Chinese Ideas of Life and Death*, 80–91.

33 See Raphals, "Divination in the *Han Shu*," 80–81.

on the text implying that it has ever been used as a divination.³⁴ Whatever the reasons behind these bibliographical decisions, while “arts of calculation” approximately corresponds with our understanding of mantic arts, we should not equate them.

Nevertheless, these classifications are also very telling regarding how historical actors perceive the relationship between certain mantic techniques. For example, In “Treatise of Arts and Texts,” divinations related to shapes, such as geomancy and physiognomy are categorized under “methods of shapes” (*xingfa* 形法). In contrast, the *Catalogue* isolates geomancy as an independent section, while grouping physiognomy with methods such as horoscopes, under the category “fate books and physiognomic books” (*mingshu xiangshu zhi shu* 命書相書之屬). Comparing these two groupings, we can see that the former emphasizes the shared technical principles (e.g. observations of shapes), and the latter the uses (e.g. to know individual’s long-term fate). For another example, while the method of *Taiyi* deity, Mysterious Gates Escaping Techniques, and the art of the six Ren share similar technical principles, the catalogue classifies the former two under the category of “yin-yang wuxing” (*yiyang wuxing zhi shu* 陰陽五行之屬), and the latter one under that of “milfoil and tortoise divination” (*zhan bu zhi shu* 占卜之屬). These examples suggest various ways of showing what is important about mantic techniques through prioritizing certain features in classifications.

In fact, there is no single way of classifying mantic arts, and modern scholars’ practices also reflect our analytical preferences. Often their categories allude to the imperial Chinese ones. For example, Lisa Raphals categorizes early Chinese divination as “turtle and milfoil,” “the heavens,” “hemerology,” “pitch pipes,” “dream divination,” and “physiognomy.”³⁵ The first two categories correspond well with the ones in the “Treatise of Arts and Texts,” and the last three categories all appear in the text as well. However, “hemerology” (divination based on certain days’ auspiciousness in the calendar) stands as a new category, which puts together various practices scattered in different categories in the “Treatise.” Her classification is aimed to sort different types of methods, while maintaining the distinctions found in the historical context of the time.

Similarly, Marc Kalinowski’s taxonomy of Dunhuang divination seeks to unify different categories by using names with Ancient Greek roots:

34 Cf. Fracasso, “Teratascopy or Divination by Monsters,” 657–700.

35 Raphals, *Divination and Prediction*, 128–47. Compare this categorization with Kalinowski’s one for the Han dynasty prognostication: age-old techniques of divination by turtle; divination through the observation of signs in nature; and hemerology. See his “Divination and Astrology,” 342–43. Interestingly, in the chapter, while Kalinowski introduces his categorization, his narrative still largely follows the *Hanshu*.

Uranomancy (divination by heavens), hemerology (divination by calendars), cleromancy (divination by lot casting), oniromancy (divination by dreams), auguromancy (divination by omens), iatromancy (divination through medical treatments), physiognomy, topomancy, calendars, and talismans. Most of the categories reflect the idea of divination using a certain object. Because these terms are used to classify divinations outside China, they create an anchor for comparison. However, the last two categories are less compatible with the rest of the categories: talismans are not divination by definition; calendars seem to overlap with hemerology. The existence of these two categories is due to the fact that in traditional Chinese bibliographies they are often under “arts of calculation” together with divinatory methods.

There is inherently nothing wrong to combine modern analytical categories with traditional bibliographical ones.³⁶ It is certainly convenient to adopt an existing category than creating one *ex nihilo*. More importantly, the traditional categories could reflect how imperial Chinese people perceived mantic arts. Following those categories to certain degree could protect one from anachronism and potentially imperialist perspectives. Nevertheless, the combination approach could face the problem of incompatibility. In those imperial Chinese treatises, “arts of calculation” serves mainly as a bibliographical category, which might not be focused on one single, unified concept like “divination.” This is why many techniques traditionally under “arts of calculation”, such as calendars and talismans cannot be directly translated into mantic arts.

In contrast, there are classifications that are more framed in Western or our analytical categories. For example, Michael Loewe (1981) divides Chinese divination into three categories: bones and shells divination, *Book of Changes* divination, and geomancy. In his arrangement, astrology does not belong to divination, because it belongs to omen observation. He defines “divination” as follows: “Divination comprised a deliberate search by man for the answers to questions and included the artificial production of signs for the purpose.”³⁷ In other words, based on his definition, it is the artificial production of signs that counts as divination. In contrast, various kinds of observation of natural signs belong to the general category of oracles. As Loewe defines them, “oracles included questions that were put to signs already inherent in nature and recognizable to those gifted with certain faculties.”³⁸ Both “divination” and “oracles”

36 Kalinowski, *Divination et société dans la Chine médiévale*, 11–20; Kalinowski, “Divination and Astrology,” 342–43. Xie, *Shuzang*. And Wang, *Dunhuang zhanbu wenxian*.

37 Loewe and Blacker, *Oracles and Divination*, 38–62.

38 Ibid., 38–39.

belong to the category of mantic arts in the broad sense. This distinction gives a new layer in understanding mantic practices.

Hemerology is not a category in traditional Chinese bibliographies, but it aptly generalizes a large amount of mantic texts under the same technical core: correlations between two series of symbols, often one related to time (such as Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches), and the other related to auspiciousness (such as the *jianchu* sequence). This kind of divination has not only been abundantly excavated from early Chinese tombs, its technical core has also been adopted into various divinations such as the three board techniques. Joachim Gentz has used “hemerology” as an analytical category to group early Chinese mantic arts. Based on this category, he shows how certain techniques are methodologically related to each other. More importantly, he is also able to identify various ways of developing new techniques from the simplest technical core.³⁹ This taxonomical approach does more than simply reveal possible groupings; it also shows the generative power of techniques.

Classification reflects more than just a catalog of mantic arts; it can also uncover the historical and technical relationships between the arts. It can even suggest how one method leads to another. In taxonomy these relationships could be highlighted in an important and discernable way. As we saw, so far there are two foci: one analyzing ancient Chinese taxonomies, and the other on creating new ones. The latter kind seems to be a contemporary invention, but in fact it could uncover layers of meanings in ancient methods that have been overlooked. In order to further unpack the former focus, Marc Kalinowski's chapter in this volume will survey the taxonomies in traditional China and the terminologies around them. Moving onto the latter focus, Stephen Bokenkamp's chapter will examine prophecies in traditional China, which are abundant in practice, but did not typically form a separate category in the bibliographic treatises concerning the “arts of calculation.” His chapter demonstrates that analytical categories can help us see the rich, but sometimes hidden layers of mantic practices in traditional China.

3.3 *Mantic Arts, Interpretation, and Psychology*

Mantic arts have a close relationship with exegesis, because they always start with the interpretation of signs. Let the signs be bone cracks, a pile of yarrow stalks, the shape of a liver, or a series of phonetic symbols, both mantic art and exegesis seek to elucidate otherwise ambiguous marks. Tzvetan Todorov has already pointed out the tangible relationship between the two practices by

39 Gentz, “Elf Thesen zur Eigenart und Systematik früher chinesischer Chronomantik,” 101–10.

dividing exegetic practice into two kinds: commentary and divination. To him, mantic arts belong to the larger enterprise of exegesis.⁴⁰

Todorov's insight has traveled from literary criticism to classical studies. For example, Eckart Frahm and Scott B. Noegel have discussed the similarities between commentaries and divinatory texts in the ancient Middle East. Particularly, Frahm has shown that a long tradition of divinatory interpretation led to Babylonian and Assyrian textual commentaries in the first millennium BCE. People read the texts as they read signs from nature.⁴¹ Where Todorov focuses on taxonomy, Frahm turns to the divinatory origin of textual commentaries.

Scholars of Chinese studies have also noticed the connection between mantic arts and exegesis. For example, John B. Henderson has pointed out that classical exegesis emerged from a mantic context. This is most obvious in the case of the *Book of Changes*, originally a mantic manual that became one of the classics. He points out that both exegesis and mantic arts deal with uncertainty and changes in the present and future. He also argues that on a more abstract level, both mantic and classical texts appear to be all-compassing: they appear to contain the entirety of knowledge about the world. More interestingly, Henderson places the Chinese classical exegesis with Talmudic, Qur'anic, and biblical exegesis.⁴² This comparative approach is especially noticeable when it comes to the issue of mentalities behind mantic arts.

If we view mantic arts as a way to cope with uncertainty, we can see it as a series of psychological processes. Indeed, when a client comes to a diviner asking about a future event, the client already has an agenda: they want to have a good result. In the clients' minds are anxieties about the future. Thus, diviners often deal with their clients' anxieties and emotions, which resembles the function of psychotherapy today. In the 60's, Marlene Dobkin mentioned the psychotherapeutic functions of Peruvian divination. In the 90's, Luo Zhengxin also pointed to this function of divination in Chinese studies. More recently, Richard Smith has argued that traditional Chinese divination worked as a kind of premodern psychotherapy.⁴³

When it comes to twentieth century psychological theories, the *Book of Changes* has received special attention. The psychologist Carl Jung wrote a preface to Richard Wilhelm's and Cary F. Baynes's translation of the *Changes*.

40 Todorov, *Symbolism and Interpretation*, 31.

41 Frahm, "Reading the Tablit"; and Noegel, "Sign, Everywhere a Sign."

42 Henderson, "Divination and Confucian Exegesis," 79–89.

43 Dobkin, "Fortune's Malice," 132–41. Luo, "Suanming yu xinli fudao," 316–37. Smith, "Psychology of Divination."

He argues that the logic behind the *Changes* is the “meaningful coincidence” without causal connections. He refers to this relationship as “synchronicity,” as opposed to a causal relationship. Moreover, Jung believes that the *Changes* contains a system of symbols that has been shared by a community of people, the system he calls an “archetype.” These archetypes appear in arts, literature, and dreams unconsciously and collectively.⁴⁴ Therefore, the *Changes* is a telling example of what the Chinese think and how they think. Following this path, Rudolf Ritsema and Stephen Karcher (1994) peppered their translation of the *Changes* with Jungian interpretation.⁴⁵ When it comes to 2000’s, Richard Smith continues to illustrate this Jungian tradition of understanding the *Changes* and Chinese culture by and large.⁴⁶

As closely related as mantic arts and the science of the mind are, their relationship has not received enough continuous enthusiasm. Particularly for the Jungian theory, the reason is that the majority of psychological theorists have moved beyond Jungian and Freudian psychology. More generally, while mantic arts affect human minds and emotions, we should be careful with their connections to “psychology” or “psychoanalysis.” Like physics and biology, psychology or psychoanalysis are twentieth-century disciplines, and they have their specific premises and principles, which are radically different even from psychology (or more literally “mental philosophy”) in the nineteenth century. For one thing, twentieth century psychology centers on laboratory experiments and quantifiable calibration. Neither of these standards was a main concern in nineteenth-century psychology, an offshoot of philosophy, which was speculative pondering on the human mind’s functions. Therefore, we might overlook the nuances of psyche and emotions if we indiscriminately impose twentieth century psychological terms on practices in ancient China.⁴⁷

3.4 *The Debate of Rationality*

Scholars have attempted to analyze how divination also might reveal practices of thinking. Starting from late nineteenth century, this trend of study has sought to understand ways of thinking attached to magic and divination especially among communities that were considered “primitive.” Often the way of thinking among the “primitive” people was considered different from

44 Tarnas, *Cosmos and Psyche*, 50. Smith, “Psychology of Divination,” 6–7.

45 Ritsema and Karcher, *I Ching*.

46 Smith, “Psychology of Divination,” 6–12.

47 For example, in the *Divination of Maheśvara*, worry, or you 憂 appears not so much as an involuntary feeling as an action of thinking. This conception of the emotion differs from our contemporary understanding of worry. See Dotson, Cook, and Zhao, *Dice and Gods on the Silk Road*, 59–61.

and inferior to modern and Western rationality and logic, however they were defined. Back in 1871, Edward Burnett Tylor assumed that divination and magic relied on the “association of ideas,” a faculty “which lies at the very foundation of human reason, but in no small degree of human unreason, also.”⁴⁸ Most famously, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl coined the concept of “primitive mentality,” which imagined that “primitive” people are not able to think abstractly, to distinguish reality from the supernatural, or to perceive contradictions. He further assigned this mentality to the practice of divination.⁴⁹ In 1934, Edward Evans-Pritchard argued that both magical and logical thinking were used in Zande healing, which involved magic and divination.⁵⁰ In other words, as opposed to Lévy-Bruhl, Evans-Pritchard did not doubt the capability of logical reasoning in the Zande case, but he also pointed out that logical reasoning was mixed with magical reasoning. In this framework, mantic arts represent primitive mind sets and are opposite to reasoning, logic, and rationality.

This teleological and imperialist view has given way to a more pluralistic one. In the 80's, philosophers paid more attention to relativism: some of them argued that people conceptualized things differently (conceptual relativism); some of them argued that people perceived the world differently (perceptual relativism); and some of them argued that truths and reasons were dependent on contexts, societies, places, and time. In this way, when something is considered reasonable in Western societies and is not necessarily reasonable in East Asian societies, it does not mean that one is reasonable and the other is not.⁵¹ Following this framework, Chinese medicine is no longer inferior to, but alternative to Western medicine. Mantic arts are accordingly no longer products of underdeveloped mentalities, but testimony to different way of thinking, or even an alternative science.⁵²

Certainly, not all the scholars take a relativist position, and relativism itself raises more questions. If there are multiple rationalities, can they understand each other? Can one concept in one context be comprehended by people from another context? This is the question of cultural translation and commensurability.⁵³ But if certain cultural phenomena are translatable, then are we dealing with inherently different rationalities or the same one that is manifested in different contexts? When it comes to mantic arts, we can

48 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1104.

49 Lévy-Bruhl, *Primitive Mentality*, 21–33.

50 Evans-Pritchard, “Zande Therapeutics,” 49–62.

51 Hollis and Lukes, *Rationality and Relativism*, 1–6. Also see Epstein's criticism of this trend in his “Diviner and the Scientist,” 1050–52.

52 See for example, Olson and Torrance, *Modes of Thought*.

53 Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion*, 111–39.

accordingly see a range of stances from: 1) they reflect categorically different rationality (including irrationality), to 2) they reflect seemingly different rationalities, and to 3.) they reflect the same kind of rationality as Western rationality but with different manifestations.

When it comes to China, the discussion of mentality is focused on “correlative cosmology” or “correlative thinking.” For most scholars, this way of thinking draws correlation between different aspects of the world, between which there are no apparent links in our modern eyes. For example, in this framework, each of the Five Phases corresponds to different directions, different colors, different human organs, etc. Some scholars assume that this correlative thinking is categorically different from analytical thinking; the former examines the world from a homologous and holistic perspective, and the latter does so from an atomistic and critical logic. Behind this distinction is the connotation that correlative thinking is more primitive. For example, John Henderson believes that it “has roots in what anthropologists call primitive cultures.” And more recently Stephen Field assumes that correlative cosmology “although superficially logical, nevertheless cannot be scientifically validated.”⁵⁴ Divination is also seen as a product of this correlative mindset.⁵⁵

Other scholars view correlative thinking not as inferior, but as different from the Western worldview. In exploring Chinese scientific thinking, Joseph Needham argued “Chinese coordinative thinking was *not* primitive thinking in the sense that it was an alogical or pre-logical chaos in which anything could be the cause of anything else ... But it was a universe in which this organization came about ...”⁵⁶ Similarly, A.C. Graham argued that correlative thinking is not a product of certain societies or time period, but a universal way of thinking rooted even in our languages.⁵⁷ Both Needham and Graham sought to wash away the pejorative connotation behind correlative thinking and its exclusive link to Chinese civilization. Accordingly, divination is also a product of such universal alternative thinking. While they attempted to strike a balance between different rationalities, they still have a rather exclusive view of

54 Field, *Ancient Chinese Divination*, 7–20, esp. 20. Henderson, *Development and Decline*, 1.

55 Henderson, *Development and Decline*, 53. Also see Lai, “Classical China,” 29: “It is apparent why these thinkers took on the practice of divination. Believing in a correlative cosmology, it would have been integral to their perspective on existence, to decipher and interpret the workings of *wuxing*, *yin-yang*, their respective correlations, and their transformations.”

56 Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 2, 286–87. Needham also provided a useful evaluation on how his contemporary scholars understood magic and divination. See *ibid.*, 279–86.

57 See Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, 320–22, 367–68.

science, which celebrates causal relations, formal logic, and experiments. By holding this definition of science as the yardstick, divination is still inferior. No wonder Needham called mantic arts “pseudo-sciences,” instead of calling modern science “experimental divination.”⁵⁸

Moving forward from Needham, other scholars attempted to prove that mantic arts share the same kind of rationality that lies behind science. For example, Francesca Rochberg argues that Babylonian omen interpretations apply protasis and apodosis in a logically valid way in the modern sense, implying the logic behind Babylonian divination is not categorically different from that behind modern science.⁵⁹ When it comes to China, David N. Keightley treats “the Shang system of prediction and curing as scientific because of the elaborate, consistent, and impersonalized theological structures, ritual practices, and cosmological assumptions that Shang elites developed to give them cultural advantage and assurance when confronted with the world in general with illness, weather, and bronze-casting in particular.”⁶⁰ Meanwhile, following Nathan Sivin, he defines science in the ancient world as that which involved “systematic, coherent discourse about natural phenomena that strives toward an ideal of abstraction and objectivity.”⁶¹ Behind this change of definition is Keightley’s dissatisfaction with “science” being understood as an anachronistic and teleological term in the field of modern history and history of science.⁶² Following this argument, at least certain mantic arts such as Shang oracle bone inscriptions might just be considered as scientific and reflect the same kind of reasoning as modern science.

The issue of rationality in mantic arts challenges the field of philosophy and the history of science in many ways. As mentioned above, a cluster of questions can be raised regarding rationalities, reasoning, logic, and contexts. When it comes to the history of science, the very definition of “science” and the discourses around it have prevented the field from adequately discussing ancient societies. Mantic arts are right in the middle of this inadequacy. This debate might not be easily settled as the landscape of science and its legitimacy is

58 As how in the early 20th century G. Stanley Hall and others differentiated themselves from their predecessors by calling themselves “experimental psychologists,” during which time “psychology” still meant mental philosophy and was part of philosophy department curriculum.

59 Rochberg, “If P, then Q,” 23–25.

60 Keightley, “‘Science’ of the Ancestors,” 143–87, esp. 144.

61 Sivin, “Science and Medicine in Imperial China,” 43.

62 Keightley, “‘Science’ of the Ancestors,” 144. The criticism of the very narrow definition of science is articulated by Sivin, “Science and Medicine in Imperial China,” 43, and Lloyd, *Ambitions of Curiosity*, 1 and 21.

constantly shifting. But reviewing the debate of rationality can be helpful for us to be aware how much the assumptions of science can shape our perspectives on mantic arts and its value.

In this chapter, we have seen the many forms of thought and ideas in mantic arts, ranging from individual concepts to reflections on rationalities. They reify mantic techniques as well as shape our perceptions on these techniques. As previous scholarship has shown, many ideas are borrowed from more well studied intellectual tenets in traditional China, but others come from more obscure tradition, or even originated from divinatory practices. In turn, an individual's intellectual background forms their views through the action of interpreting, classifying, and evaluating divinatory practices. In the rest of the volume, we will further discuss these actions and see how they manifest in different quarters of life: religion, literature, politics, and social life through past to present day.

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Divination in BCE China according to Newly-Recovered and Excavated Texts

An Overview

Constance Cook

Some of the most exciting new information about divination and mantic arts in early China has appeared in the past century. We know about the practice of divination record-making from the early bronze age, the late Shang and early Zhou oracle bones, which date from the thirteenth through eleventh centuries BCE. These materials were discovered over a hundred years ago. In the past fifty years, bamboo and silk divination records and manuals of interpretation have been unearthed from late bronze age tombs, which date from the fifth through first centuries BCE. The types of knowledge reflected in these manuscripts reflect the dynamic socio-political changes of transition into the imperial age. This time period begins in the last half of the Warring States period, when a handful of powerful states fought each other and the powerful Qin, moving in from the northwest. It ends after the fall of the first Han empire in the second century BCE. These manuscripts show the slow adherence to a coherent cosmology advocated by Qin and Han central courts to manage the explosive variety of knowledge, methodologies, and texts. Newly-recovered manuscripts reveal a diversity mostly erased from the transmitted textual tradition. Organized roughly chronologically, the following discussion of sample inscriptions and manuscripts documents this epistemological transition and the diversity.

Previous to the discovery of these recovered materials, scholars organized divination techniques and manuals according to information in transmitted texts, thus into only two categories, the cracking of turtle bones and the casting of milfoil stalks. Modern archaeology reveals that osteopyromancy, the burning and cracking of bones, employed many types of bones and that it was only during the early bronze age that turtle plastrons became the preferred media. Recent discoveries from late bronze age tombs reveal that some divination stalks, for cleromancy or random sortilege, were made out of bamboo (instead of the traditionally understood yarrow) and that the stalk divination method was tied up with numerology. In addition, new categories of divination manuals reveal a vast array of charts and diagrams used in calendrical astrology

or hemerology, the science of good and bad days. This involved mathematical and astronomical knowledge. Some of these diagrams are take-offs from popular divination tools, such as the astrolabe or cosmic-board. Some related boards required the casting of tokens and dice instead of stalks. The range of divination factors calculated expanded to include other types of data, such as musical notes and hours of the day. Omenology, for example of weather and dreams, evident already in the earliest divination records, was codified in texts during the early imperial age. Texts from tombs suggest a fuzzy separation of early science from magic. Technical knowledge in fields, such as astronomy, calendar systems, mathematics, and medicine, was originally woven into divination practices.¹

The texts used by specialists in these practices that accompany the expanded technical knowledge comprise an epistemic genre we might typify as the “divination manual,” that is texts used together with other implements or diagrams for routine and emergency decision-making.² Preserved examples date as early as the fourth century BCE. Their contents may derive from a synergistic mixing of the practices from the many subcultures that inhabited the upper, middle, and lower reaches of the two great rivers that served for many millennia as the cradle of early Chinese civilization, the Yellow River and the Yangtze River. Most startling to modern scholars is the demotion of the classic manual of divination and traditional source for metaphysical speculation to a status of being one of many different manuals available to the elite of the late bronze age. Up to recently, scholars considered the transmitted classic, the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of changes, also known as the *Zhouyi* 周易, *Zhou Changes*), to represent the rise of Zhou civilization beginning during the eleventh century BCE, over barbarian practices. We know now that the cosmology of Yin and Yang “changes” reflected in it had not achieved primacy until the early imperial age and that it represented a simplified version of earlier diversity.

One dynamic of ancient society that these discoveries reflect is the deeply ingrained belief that the inner and outer environments of individuals are awash with moving natural or supernatural influences, including invisible agents of humans past (ghosts and ancestral spirits), the surrounding landscape and sky, all-powerful gods, and calendrical units of time.³ Spirits in amorphous bureaucracies that varied over time and place had the power to

1 See Martin Kern on *Aufhebung* of the *Yijing*, that is the erasure of evidence of divination practice from transmitted divination texts, “Early Chinese Divination.” Marc Kalinowski describes it as an alienation of speculative thought from the oracular, see Kalinowski, “Divination et astrologie,” 296.

2 See Pomata, “The Recipe and the Case.”

3 For the individual as a microcosm, see Sivin, “State, Cosmos, and Body.”

influence the individuals and each other. The media of divination made their powers more visible to specialists trained in techniques and interpretation. By the end of late bronze age, the proliferation of manuals broadened as the empire expanded and provided access to divination methods for diagnosis and prediction to a broader population of literate elites than existed during the early bronze age. Magical methods persisted alongside more “scientific” ones.⁴ Nevertheless, specialist communities, including diviners proficient in various methods, persisted as well and can be traced back to the manufacture of early bronze age divination oracle bone records.

A major shift in cosmological viewpoint occurred during the late bronze age. Already in fourth century BCE records, we see clear evidence of alienation from the late Shang-early Zhou pantheons of royal ancestors and high gods. Royal ancestors persist, but mythical kings do too. The replacement of the High God (Shangdi 上帝) by the Grand Unity (Taiyi 太一, also written 太乙) precipitated the dropping of the Four Quadrates or four Regions model (*sifang* 四方) of the early bronze age⁵ for the Yin Yang Five Agents (*yinyang wuxing* 陰陽五行) template. At the beginning of the late bronze age, in the fourth century BCE, the four quadrates or directional regions began to be correlated with four of the Five Agents, Wood with East, Water with North, Metal with West, and Fire with South. By the early imperial age, a fifth Agent, Earth, was correlated to the center, the cosmological pivot occupied by the idealized king or emperor. While human spirits and ghosts would persist through time as influences that could obstruct one’s career or sicken one’s body, the macrocosmic agents, whose operations were visible in the movement of stars and the changes of seasons, moved objectively. The only living individuals capable of causing disturbances might be the most powerful leaders, the kings and emperors, whose behavior had to be monitored and guided by specialists, including diviners.

The earliest transmitted text mentioning oracular literature is the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (Zuo chronicle), probably compiled during the first centuries of the late bronze age.⁶ The *locus classicus* for the discussion of divination technique is traced to a 645 BCE diviner recorded in the *Zuozhuan*. He attempts to explain the relationship between the two standard methods of divination, turtle and stalk, and to rationalize why one must precede the other, using imagery of cosmic production familiar in early Daoist material: “turtle divination produces

4 For a discussion of literacy and “manuscript culture,” see Harper, “Daybooks,” and Kalinowski, “Hemerology and Prediction,” 140–1. For the persistence of magical techniques and of technical transmission and manual readership, see also Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*, 3–67, 148–83.

5 Allan, *The Shape of the Turtle*.

6 See Kalinowski, “La rhétorique oraculaire.”

images and stalk divination produces numbers. Anything born (into the material world) has an image, and once it does, that image can multiply. Multiples of anything can then be counted” (龜，象也。筮，數也。物生而後有象，象而後有滋，滋而後有數。)⁷ The rhetorical style of this line suggests a repeated adage regarding categories of divination accepted at local courts for resolving political decisions. It is likely that many other methods were employed by individuals for personal decisions. Hints in the transmitted literature regarding “methods of calculation” (*shushu* 數術) involving hemerological and other materials appear only in early imperial texts.⁸ It is now obvious to modern scholars that diviners, inside and outside the royal courts, employed a large variety of mantic techniques to guide and negotiate daily life.⁹ It is unlikely that a single method or instrument was used exclusively.

1 Bone Divination (Osteopyromancy)

Animal bones as divination tools in heartland East Asia trace back to the sixth millennium BCE. From Gansu through Mongolia and down the Yellow River valley into Henan, diviners scorched the backs and “read” the cracks on the front of selected bones. These bones were initially of mostly domesticated animals such as pigs, sheep, goats, water buffalo, and other cattle. The preferred body part was the shoulder bone. In some cases, it was clear that the bone had been sculpted into a smoother more triangular shape, and, occasionally, chiseling included hollows on the back of the bone where the heated poker was applied to create an omen crack on the opposite side.¹⁰ From later bone inscriptions dating to as early as the second half of the second millennium BCE (with a peak of production beginning around 1300 BCE), we know that the operative function of the scorched bone was to produce cracks that would be interpreted as “auspicious” (*ji* 吉) or not. This process of “crack-making” was called *bu* 卜.¹¹ The period represented by inscribed bones was the peak of civilization centered around the ancient mortuary city in modern Anyang, Henan, known by

7 Durrant, Li, Schaberg, *Zuo Tradition*, 324–7. See esp. p. 326, n. 216. See Cook, “Text, Birth and Nature”; Cook, “Mother.”

8 Liu, “Daybooks,” 58, 60; Harper, “Daybooks,” 109–10.

9 See the surveys by Raphals, *Divination and Prediction*; Thote, “Daybooks in Archaeological Context.”

10 Piao Zaifu, *Xian Qin bufa yanjiu*, 15–51; Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 3. For an essay on the mantic “image” of oracle bones, particularly regarding the placement of the “traces de brûlage,” see Venture, “La représentation visuelle.”

11 See Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 1–2; Keightley, *Working for His Majesty*, 279.

its Zhou title as The Ruins of Yin, Yinxu 殷墟 (“Yin” was the Zhou name for the Shang). The Shang people prepared their oracle bones by soaking them in an unknown liquid before chiseling, scorching, and sometimes inscribing them.¹² In some cases, the plastrons were polished and the inscriptions filled with cinabar or other materials for display possibly in temples and during ancestral sacrifices.¹³ The successful political and economic organization of the Shang enabled the importation of exotic bones. Besides the occasional bone from hunted animals (such as tigers, rhinos, and possibly non-Shang humans), the most highly prized was the turtle plastron, an item possibly imported from what is now southeast coastal China or raised in nearby farms.¹⁴ Instead of a triangle, the plastrons were cruciform shaped, a shape popular in mortuary architecture and possibly representing the cosmic diagram of the four directions and supernatural powers, or the imagined terrestrial quadrates (*sifang* 四方).¹⁵ Plastrons were the preferred medium used for divining about “afflictions” (*ji* 疾) caused by a range of ancestral and other powers suffered by the King in different parts of his body or in his kingdom.

Teams of diviners organized divination events addressing routine and acute issues according to a cyclical sexagenary calendar composed of ten “sun” (now known as Stem) days linked posthumously to royal ancestral powers and twelve other signs (now known as Branch) days, clearly significant but of unknown value. After the crack-making, scribes inscribed brief records of the diviners’ efforts to determine which spirits were influencing the king’s body, family, and domain. Topics included warfare, agriculture, hunting, health, birthing, weather, sacrifices, and omens that appeared in the environment or in the king’s dreams. Every ten days (the traditional Chinese week), the diviners checked in. There is some evidence that the bones themselves were perceived while in use to contain a spirit.¹⁶ Although the primary locus of the divination practice with textual records was the royal Shang court based in Anyang, other elite groups to the south, east, and west also practiced a more limited production of divination record production.¹⁷ The royal court oversaw professionals in charge of bone workshops and divining. The primary spirits suspected of being responsible for the good and bad fortune were royal ancestors although

12 Chang, *Shang Civilization*, 32–3.

13 Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 10–5.

14 Takashima, *Studies of Fascicle Three*, 1: 77–8. Note that elite women (*fu* 婦) were in charge of inspecting the imports (73–4).

15 Allan, *The Shape of the Turtle*.

16 See the discussion by Takashima, *Studies of Fascicle Three*, 1: 70–2. Jao Tsong-I 饒宗頤 suggests that the turtle was understood to be a water spirit, Jao, “Lun gui wei shuimu.”

17 Takashima, “Literacy to the South,” 1: 141–3; Smith, “Evidence for Scribal Training,” 173.

the records reveal concerns with a pantheon of earth and sky spirits as well.¹⁸ The highest god associated with the Four Quadrate cosmos was *di* “above” (Shangdi 上帝) which may have been a star god, although the title *di* (roughly “god-king”) was also applied posthumously to many of the deceased kings.¹⁹ Besides the signs of the days and the spirits linked to them, diviners and their kings had to consider a range of other factors in calculating auspiciousness. These factors included the sound and shape of the bone cracks, the types of sacrificial animals to use, locations, weather, territorial integrity, and other omens. The environment, especially its rivers and mountains, was imbued with spiritual energies.

This fundamental religious structure of spiritual powers remains the same throughout early Chinese history, except that the royal ancestors were overtime forgotten and replaced by other deities, particularly astral and other nature deities, and by the end of the second century CE, an underground pantheon of terrestrial spirits is also evident.²⁰ A new term appeared in texts to a mobile cosmic energy, vapor (*qi* 氣), which eventually was divided into Yang and Yin and Five Agent forces. These concepts are unknown in the Shang period, although the binary opposition of positive and negative was an essential part of the Shang divinatory rhetoric. Positive and negative outcomes were tested on opposing sides of the bones (usually the same surface, but also combined aspects of front and back or even a number of different bones). There was also a binary division among gendered ancestral spirits that generally reflected the patriarchal political structure, that is women who produced heirs for the kings were accorded “Stem” titles after death and were incorporated into the spirit hierarchy.²¹ The importance of gender as a distinctive force would reappear in late bronze age stalk divination manuals. During the early bronze age, the king’s body acted as the pivot of influence between the hierarchy of royal dead. The king’s government and the lands around the capital symbolized his extended body. Ancestral spirits, more than environmental spirits or celestial gods, exerted direct influence over human affairs. The turtle body especially

18 Keightley, *The Ancestral Landscape*, 109–10.

19 Eno, “Shang State Religion,” 54–77; Keightley, *The Ancestral Landscape*, 17–96; Allan, “The Great One”; Allan, “Identity of Shang Di,”; Pankenier, “A Brief History of Beiji,”; Ban, “Zai tan Beiji jianshi”; Keightley, *Working for His Majesty*, 289; Pankenier, *Astrology and Cosmology*, 83–108.

20 Poo, “Preparation for the Afterlife,” 19–22, and Guo, “Concepts of Death,” 95–104. For changes in ancestor worship over time, see Cook, “Ancestor Worship”; Cook, *Ancestors, Kings, and the Dao*.

21 Royal women were active in court affairs, battles, engineering projects, and supervising the importation of bones but only those who gave birth to heirs were elevated into the spirit hierarchy.

was used to identify the influential spirits that harmed the king's corporal self and his state.

Of the approximately one hundred thousand pieces of preserved oracle bones (that is those bones with writing), most are small fragments. The inscribed records are themselves small notations placed near some of the numbered cracks on what must have been more involved processes, including sacrifices, prayers, announcements, and other rituals.²² Not all inscriptions were oracular.²³ Complete scapula or plastrons and multi-bone sets are rare, but those that did survive can be used to represent model divination events, or normative divination records.²⁴ What we find is that divination events were often parts of larger ritual cycles following a definite schedule over long periods of time.²⁵ Often one diviner was responsible for particular repeated divination events. The king's interpretation was recorded and adjusted over time. The divination statements set rhetorical patterns repeated ritually with each event. Since they are carved on the bone after it had been cracked, it is assumed that they are culled from a spoken ritual during the cracking operation.²⁶

The rhetorical formulas of the inscribed record for a divination event includes four parts:²⁷

Preface: cyclical date (of the sexagenary calendar) crack-making (*bu*)²⁸ was performed and the name of the diviner responsible for presenting the inquiry noted.

Charge (test a proposal, *zhen* 貞): positive or negative option for an action presented.²⁹

Prognostication (*zhan* 占): notations on the reverse side regarding the auspiciousness of the crack include "highly auspicious" (*shangji*

22 Bagley, "Anyang Writing," 191–200, esp. p. 196.

23 For example, a carved rhinoceros leg bone recorded a successful hunt (of a black rhinoceros) by the king and the times and occasion for a subsequent sacrifice. See bone no. 261 in Guo and Hu, *Jiaguwen heji*.

24 Not all bone inscriptions recorded divination events. Some revealed no evidence of crack-making and seemed to serve simply as ritual records. Chang, *Shang Civilization*, 37–9.

25 For example, ten-day cycles for divinations regarding attacking the Renfang (Keightley, *The Ancestral Landscape*, 137).

26 See Bagley, "Anyang writing," 191–200.

27 Chang, *Shang Civilization*, 35; Keightley, *Sources*, 113–21.

28 Huang, *Guwenzi lunji*, 330; Takashima, *Studies of Fascicle Three*, 20–2; Keightley, *Working for His Majesty*, 1: 279.

29 Takashima, *Studies of Fascicle Three*, 1: 22–5; Keightley, *Working for His Majesty*, 359–60. Jao Tsong-I 饒宗頤 follows Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) and emphasizes the relationship of the word *zhen* with *zheng* 正 "to rectify," see Jao Tsong-I, "'Zhen' de zhexue."

上吉), “greatly auspicious” (*daji* 大吉), “slightly auspicious” (*shaaji* 少吉), among other terms. Sometimes further notes on the nature of the inquiry are recorded on the front of the bone, especially if the diviner was the king.³⁰

Verification (*yun* 允): Notes on the correctness of the prognostication.

A critical aspect of Shang bone divination is the focus on the binomial relationship of a positive or negative response from the spirit world through the bone. In many cases, both options are tested. There was also a concern with balancing writing on the left and right sides of the bones. The back and fronts of the turtle plastron are divided into spaces, with positive statements pronounced (and then inscribed) onto one side and then the opposite directed to the other side. The direction of the inscribed texts on the right and left sides of the bone also were written in mirror fashion, just as we see that the holes drilled in the back (to thin the bone for crack-making) represented reflected oppositions carved into two fields that divide the bone in half with the niches of each side facing opposite directions. Cracks were later numbered, commonly in sets of 5 and 10, with some marked “auspicious” (*ji*). The oppositions may play out over several bones instead of on a single plastron or perhaps between the front and back of a single plastron.

We can see an example of a set of inscriptions inscribed on the front (recto, “A”) and backs (verso, “B”) of two bovine scapula (bones 1 and 2).³¹ Instead of providing positive and negative versions of propositions to the spirits written in opposite directions on a single plastron, these two copies are written in opposite directions on two bones. There are four divination events that occur on days 10, 20, 30, and 60 of the calendar. Activities as results to the divinations on these days occur on days 14, 25, 31, 47, and 4. If we pull apart the Stem (“s”) and Branch (“b”) signs that combine to mark the day of the sexagenary calendar, we find some interesting correlations in terms of odd and even numbers. Each of the four primary divination events take place on the tenth day of the week and the last stem day, Gui 癸. Branches include You 酉 b10, Wei 未 b8, Si 巳 b6, and Hai 亥 b12, skipping Mao 卯 b4 and Chou 丑 b2. Not only are all numbers even, but the divination cycle begins on a day when the “s” and “b” match (Day 10, s10, b10). This suggests some numerological sensitivity in the choice of both Stem and Branch signs which is significant if we consider the

30 See Takashima, *Studies of Fascicle Three*, 1: 32–5.

31 Guo and Hu, *Jiaguwen heji*, bone numbers 10405 and 10406.

later focus on hemerological mantic practices in which temporal signs, both Stem and Branch, acted as both omens and powers in their own terms. Why b4 and b2 (Mao and Chou) were omitted in this set is unclear, as divination events take place on Guimao and Guichou days in other records involving the same diviner. Also, if we use the CHANT database to count the number of examples of each of the six Gui days, oddly only Day 30, Guisi, is rarely used (although Guizi 癸子 which does not exist in the calendar is commonly used and read as Guisi).³² We must assume then that the numerological sensitivity relies on a spiritual pantheon outside of the signs themselves.

This set of inscriptions, dated to the King Wu Ding 武丁 reign (c.1200–1181 BCE), preserve the routine and non-routine divination concerns of roughly over a sixty-day period. Routinely, presumably on auspicious days, the king's diviner checks for forthcoming disasters. Generally, the King felt that there was a persistent curse that caused the King to have bad dreams, for incidents such as stumbling while performing a ritual, or for someone falling out of a hunting cart when the wheel hit a bump. Most ominous was the appearance of a particular cloud pattern in the east and a rainbow that seemed to appear out of the north and “drink” from the River (the Yellow River). The series ends with a note regarding a Shang elite's death, possibly a member of the generation of royal sons under Wu Ding, on a day marked with all fours (Day 4, s4 b4) and being a Ding 丁 day also associated with royal ancestors assigned posthumously to the sign Ding, such as Wu Ding's grandfather (and others many generations back). Days with stem designations were linked to sacrifices and rituals performed for the ancestors of that day sign.³³

Event 1 (written on the left side of A1 and read from right to left; written on the right side of A2 and read left to right):

32 There are 1728 Guiyou, 1646 Guiwei, 11 Guisi (1654 Guizi), 1566 Guimao, 1474 Guichou, and 1571 Guihai examples in CHANT (Chinese Ancient Texts), <http://library.princeton.edu/resource/title/chant-chinese-ancient-texts> (accessed February 9, 2018). The ancient pronunciations for Branch 6 (Si) *s-[ɕ]əʔ and Child/Branch 1 (Zi) *tsəʔ/*[ts] əʔ were close. Maybe there was avoidance of Si because of a near homophone with “die” (si) *sijʔ, although the finals reconstructed for the Warring States era show slightly different velar finals.

33 It is interesting that death occurred on a day marked with all 4s. The number four in archaic Chinese (*s.li[j]-s) was a near homophone with the word for death (*sijʔ), Baxter-Sagart Reconstruction of Old Chinese (version 1.1, 20 September 2014), <http://ocb-axtersagart.lsa.umich.edu>. On the calendar and auspicious and inauspicious days, see Keightley, *The Ancestral Landscape*, 17–53; Keightley, *Working for His Majesty*, 331–2. See also Smith, “The Chinese Sexagenary Cycle.”

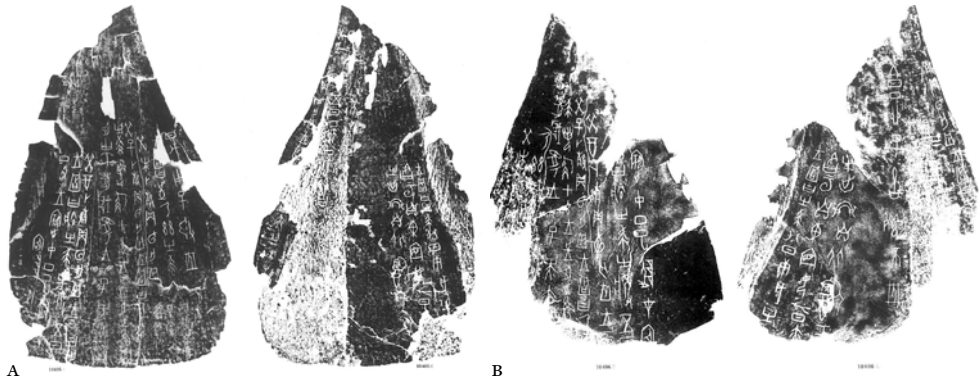


FIGURE 2.1 Rubbings of the fronts (A) and backs (B) of two bovine scapula
ADAPTED FROM GUO MORUO AND HU HOUXUAN, EDS., *Jiaguwen Heji*, VOL. 4 (BEIJING: ZHONGHUA, 1979), 1532–1535, NOS. 10405 AND 10406 FRONT AND BACK

Crack-making on Guiyou (Day 10, s10 b10), Que³⁴ divined about whether there would be any disaster³⁵ in the next 10 days. The King said twice: “harm.” The King prognosticated: “Alas, there is a curse. I had a dream.” Five days later, on a Dingchou (Day 14, s4 b2), the King was performing the “hosting”³⁶ ritual to (ancestor) Zhong Ding and stumbled on the court terrace. The tenth month.³⁷

癸酉 卜殷貞旬亡禍。王二曰“旬。”王占曰：“兪！有祟，有夢。”
五日丁丑王賓中丁祀鼓(?) 在廳堆。十月。

Event 11 (written on the right side of A1 and read left to right; written on the left side of A2 and also read left to right):

Crack-making on Guiwei (Day 20, s10 b8), Que divined about whether there would be any disaster in the next 10 days. The King prognosticated: “(If we) go (hunting), there is still a curse.” Six days later, on Wuzi (Day 25, s5 b1) day, Zi Gong died. The first Month.

34 Takashima reads the diviner's name as Nan. For his translation and discussion, see Takashima, *Studies of Fascicle Three*, 1: 37.

35 Some read “concerns” (*you* 憂) instead of *huo* “disaster,” see the CHANT database.

36 On the “hosting” (*bin*) ritual in which the king hosts particular ancestor spirits at sacrifices, see Keightley, *Working for His Majesty*, 276–9.

37 For a discussion of some of the words in this divination, see Takashima, *Studies of Fascicle Three*, 1: 35–46.

癸未卜殷貞旬亡禍。王占曰：往乃茲有祟。六日戊子，子攷死。一月。

Event III.1 (written in the center space of A₁ and A₂ and both are read right to left):

Crack-making on Guisi (Day 30, s10 b6), Que divined about whether there would be any disaster in the next 10 days. The King prognosticated: "There is still a curse. As directed."³⁸ On Jiawu (Day 31, s1 b7), the King was pursuing a rhino when the horse cart in which the servant was driving the King hit a bump and Zi Yang fell out.

癸巳卜殷貞旬亡禍。王占曰：“乃茲亦有祟。若僞。”甲午王往逐兕，小臣甗（載）車馬殳御王車子央亦墜。

Event III.2 (The prognostication on this event by the king is written on the right side of B₁ and read right to left and on the left side of B₂ and read left to right):

The King prognosticated: "There is a curse." Eight days later, on Gengxu (Day 47, s7 b11), there was a checkered cloud from the Eastern Facing Mother (?)³⁹ as the sun was declining a rainbow emerged from the north and drank from the River. The tenth month.⁴⁰

王占曰：“有祟。”八日庚戌有各雲自東面(?) 母昃亦有出虹自北飲于河。十月。

Event IV (written on the left side of B₁ and read left to right and on the right side of B₂ and read right to left):

Crack-making on Guihai (Day 60, s10 b12), Que divined about whether there would be any disaster in the next ten days. The King prognosticated: "... there will perhaps be a difficulty." After five days, on a Dingmao

38 For Takashima's discussion of *cheng* 僞, see Takashima, *Studies of Fascicle Three*, 1: 35–46.

39 The Mother of the East appears in other inscriptions as does a Mother of the West. Like the four directions they receive fire sacrifices. The graph read as "face" consists of a rhomboid with an eye in it. For reading it as "face," see Zhang, "Jiaguwen zhong de renti," 12. Both CHANT and Academia Sinica databases leave the graph untranscribed.

40 See discussion of rainbows and dragons in the oracle bones, Chao, "Shuo Yin buci zhong de 'hong'."

(Day 4, s4 b4), Zi X died. Should he be buried? The king prognosticated: “Just as directed.”

癸亥卜殷貞旬亡禍。王占曰 “...其亦有來艱。” 五日丁卯子 X 殊 (written 死+𣦵)。不殯 (葬?)。王占曰: “乃若僞。”

The world reflected by the bone inscriptions is that of elite clients – such as the royal family or other local aristocrats in the king’s socio-political network – within the layered and interrelated micro and macro contexts of the king’s body, his territory, and the Four Quadrate cosmos. Diviners tested concerns involving a range of topics, including political, agricultural, health, travel, war, reproduction, illness and other affairs of state. At every level of interaction, spirits both human and natural ruled. The supreme authority over all ancestral and environmental spirits in the diviner’s world was the high *di*, possibly represented in astral form. The most potent spirits, especially those who could afflict the king’s personal body, were the dead kings, also called *di*, and their female partners, “ancestresses” (*bi* 妣).⁴¹ Those most recently deceased to the king were the most likely “to harm” (*hai* 害). Groups of recent or primary powerful ancestors might be called “progenitors” (*yu* 毓) or “ancestors” (*shi* 示, *zu* 祖), with key sets of them referred to as “the many progenitors” (*duoyu* 多毓).⁴² Other spirits included “ministers” (*chen* 臣) that may have included the planets and “the Four Quadrates (or Regions)” (*sifang*) which included the directions. Geological features also had spiritual agency, such as the River (*he* 河), most likely the Yellow River, and the Mountain (*yue* 岳), most likely one of a number of powerful tall mountains near Anyang (such as Taishan 泰山).⁴³

A number of rituals were associated with divination engaging this hierarchical pantheon. Besides the cracking, testing, prognosticating and verifying, teams of diviners and ritualists kept track of the schedule of sacrifices. Adam Smith shows that by the end of the Shang era a strict schedule for ancestor worship, involving five different types of sacrifice lasted 360 days, approximately

41 Keightley, *Working for His Majesty*, 277.

42 Keightley, *Working for His Majesty*, 286, 290–1, 334, 347–8, 355–7. Other sets of primary ancestors include the “six” (*liu*) or “twenty ancestral spirits” (*ershi shi* 二十示). The ancestors had basically upper, middle and lower ranks. Some were “great” (*da* 大) and others “primary” (*yuan* 元). They were also divided into a list of “lower and upper” ancestors (*shangxia* 上下).

43 Keightley, *Working for His Majesty*, 283–4. The Five Minister Regulators (*wuchen zheng* 五臣正) may have referred to the planets. Allan, *The Shape of the Turtle*, 84, 98–103.

the length of a solar year. Each of the five (lasting 1–3 10-day weeks) began with a 10-day week of “Presentation of the (sacrificial) Roster” (*gongdian* 工典), totally about 550 sacrifice days followed by one “rest week.”⁴⁴ Besides the attention paid to days in the cycles in the bone divination, the announcements (*gao* 告) associated with each crack were performed as many of ten or more times (after 9, the numbers began again at 1) and sometimes a particular crack required four or more. Announcements varied in magnitude; they came in short (*xiao* 小) and more expansive (*da* 大) forms.⁴⁵

The ritual vocabulary is rich. The king “hosts” (*bin* 賓) a visiting ancestral spirit during a certain sacrifice at a particular time.⁴⁶ Verbal aspects of the divination ritual included “praying” (*dao* 禱), “beseeching” (*qiu* 求), invoking (*zhu* 祝), “announcements” *gao* 告, “pledges” (*ce* 冊, written with the borrowed word for bamboo strips over a “mouth” semantic 口), and oral statements (*yue* 曰).⁴⁷ If a maleficent influence is detected, then it was “exorcised” (*yu* 禦) or “removed” (*chu* 除).⁴⁸ Sacrifice was an integral aspect of the divination process. Animal offerings were “burnt” (*liao* 燎) or “braised” (*lu* 爐) whole, cleaved apart (*zhuo* 斲), cut up in bits (*ji* 幾), offered up (*you* 俎) or presented in pieces (*you* 酉 + 彡).⁴⁹ Some animals and human captives were “dismembered” (*fa* 伐). Some offerings to certain ancestors, the River, or the Mountain had to be presented in shrines that were “approached” (*ji zong* 即宗).⁵⁰ Objects used in the divination

44 Smith, “The Chinese Sexagenary Cycle,” 19–20. The evidence is clear for the end of the Shang period.

45 Keightley, *These Bones Shall Rise Again*, 125; Takashima, *Studies of Fascicle Three*, 1: xix–xx. For the various ancestral and nature spirits that receive the announcement, see Guo, “Buci zhong de ‘gao,’” 101–11. Keightley defines *gao* as a “ritual announcement,” meaning that it is an announcement of news to the spirits, usually an ancestor, often quite ancient. This ritual communication may have involved other ritual performances, such as “pledges,” “burnt offerings,” and various cutting sacrifices involving animals (Keightley, *Working for His Majesty*, 297–8). See discussion of various *gao* and the historical confusion of *gao* with *ji* 吉 “auspicious” in Takashima, *Studies of Fascicle Three*, 1: xix–xx. The numbered *gao* could understood to be notations on the quality of the crack in the bone rather than enumeration the number of ritual reports. For sound, see Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 1–2. For *xiao gao* 小告, Takashima translates “abridged announcement” (Takashima, *Studies of Fascicle Three*, 1: xx).

46 Keightley, *Working for His Majesty*, 276–8.

47 Keightley, *Working for His Majesty*, 285–6, 297–8. For investigation into a prayer, see Schwartz, “China’s First Prayer.”

48 Keightley, *Working for His Majesty*, 285, 356.

49 Ibid., 325, 352–5, 365–6.

50 Ibid., 317–20.

and accompanying rituals include bones, shells, animal or human victims, and recorded “pledges” (*ce*) (possibly on bamboo strips).⁵¹ Besides hunted victims, sometimes the divination specified rituals including the sacrifice of specially raised “penned animals” that were chosen at different times or for varying requirements according to age, gender, or color (*lao* 牢, *xiao lao* 小牢, *da lao* 大牢).⁵² Some of the conditions requiring divination and sacrifice included cases of “poison” (*gu* 蠱), “harm or toxin” (*hai* 害 or *du* 毒), “a bad omen, trouble” (*huo* 禍, *you* 尤), “spiritual blame, calamity” (*jiu* 咎, *zai* 災, 裁); “curses” (*sui* 祟), “pestilence” (*yi* 疫), “illness” (*bing* 病), “sickness” (*ji* 疾), and “alarming news” (*xi* 嬉), such as an invasion by an enemy.⁵³

Adding inscribed records to the oracle bones was a Shang innovation that spread westward to the Wei River valley, occupied by the Zhou and considered as the center of their spiritual domain from the eleventh through the eighth centuries BCE.⁵⁴ Very few archives of inscribed bone dateable to the Zhou era have been found, although oracle bones dated to the Zhou era are found from Shaanxi, east through southern Shanxi 山西 and deep into Henan, basically following the Yellow River valley.⁵⁵ The most famous is the Fengchu 風雛 site in the Qi Mountain 岐山 district of modern Shaanxi 陝西, considered the heartland of the royal Zhou lineage. The bones, known as the Zhouyuan 周原 oracle bones, had been buried in one of many side-rooms around the central court of a shrine, perhaps in the late tenth or early ninth centuries BCE.⁵⁶ The archive includes bones from early and middle eleventh century BCE, before and after the so-called Zhou Conquest of Shang in 1046 BCE. Shang cultural influence was clearly dominant. Royal ancestor worship included Cheng Tang 成湯

51 Ibid., 279–82.

52 Ibid., 323–5.

53 Ibid., 275, 305–9, 311–5.

54 The disposition and shape of the burn marks on the Qijia bones is similar to late Shang, but later Zhou bones, found in Luoyang and Houma, for example, reveal square rather than oval shaped cuts and possible different dispositions (although the pieces are fragments), see Venture, “La représentation visuelle,” 92–7.

55 Inscribed fragments have been found near the stone foundations of buildings near a Western Zhou burial ground in Huangduixiang Qijiacun 黃堆鄉齊家村 in the Fufeng 扶風 region near Qi Mountain, see Cao, *Zhouyuan yizhi*, 249–52, 255–6; Pu, *Xian Qin bufayanjie*, records thirteen early Western Zhou sites, twelve middle Western Zhou sites, and one Eastern Zhou site (in Henan); for information other Qi Mountain regional oracle bone evidence in Hejia 賀家 burial ground and in Zhou Gong miao site, see 311–12, for the Xi'an area Zhangjiapo 張家坡 and other sites to the east as far as Shanxi 山西, 312–14. Very little writing survives.

56 Wang, *Xi Zhou jiagu tanlun*, 9–20; Chen, Hou, and Chen, *Xi Zhou jiawen zhu*, i–xv.

(唐) and Tai Jia 太甲, two Shang founder kings, but also Zhou founder kings, Wen 文 and Wu 武, as well as the hero, Bi Gong 畢公, a descendant of the Zhou founder King Wen, who after fighting alongside King Wu was rewarded with lands just west in the modern Xianyang 咸陽. These Zhou figures and two others, Grand Protector (*taibao* 太保) and Master (*shi* 師), also are mentioned in early Western Zhou bronze inscriptions.⁵⁷ Bi Gong is famous as a powerful minister during the reigns of kings Cheng 成 and Kang 康, the latter half of the eleventh century BCE. It is possible that the archive belonged to Bi Gong's lineage. The bones reflect the usual concern with the presentation of proper sacrifices, prayers, pledges, and announcements. Military ventures, hunting, and travel were also primary concerns. The Zhou were clearly expanding their contacts with neighboring peoples in all directions, as a range of place names (including Chu 楚 which would become a dominant southern culture centuries later), many known from the inscriptions, appear in the Fengchu bones.

In the Zhou oracle bones, the basic four-part rhetorical structure of preface (including the calendar notation), charge, prognostication, and verification is evident in the few longer inscriptions, but the fact is that most of the bones are shards and the inscriptions extremely fragmentary and cryptic. We can see that the types of sacrifices recorded include the *liao* burning of victims at particular places and that a Chief Officer of the Masters (of military and ritual arts) (*shishi* 師氏) was in charge. One bone notes the use of turtle sacrifice, where the graph for turtle 龜 is written with a fire sign 火 underneath. Sacrifice names include “annual sacrifices to royal ancestors” (*si* 祀) and “the presentation of offerings at a shrine” (*ci* 祠). Some suggest that offerings were presented over distances, for example in shrines beginning from the city of Hao 蒿 to that of Zhou 周, a term that could stand for either Ancestral Zhou (Zongzhou 宗周), also in the Zhouyuan area, or Accomplished Zhou (Chengzhou 成周), a newer Zhou city established for administration purposes near modern Luoyang, Henan.⁵⁸ The names of many local shrines, most probably located in the Ancestral Zhou region, are mentioned in the Western Zhou bronze inscriptions. These shrines included those of distant and more recent kings, local masters, and others.⁵⁹ Bronze inscriptions, mostly dated to the first half of the Western Zhou, also

57 Wang, *Xi Zhou jiagu*, 199–250; Zhu, *Zhouyuan jiagu yanjiu*, 88–113; Cao, *Zhouyuan yizhi*, 240, 244.

58 Chen, Hou, Chen, *Xi Zhou jiawen zhu*, 1–154, Cao, *Zhouyuan yizhi*, 108–19.

59 Cao, *Zhouyuan yizhi*, 118.

record details of the ceremonies involving divination.⁶⁰ They show that the office of diviner was an inherited position.⁶¹

Shang and Zhou bones sometimes include horizontal sets of numbers (1–9), most commonly in a column of six numbers. Modern scholars interpret these as evidence of stalk divination since the famous stalk divination system of the later *Book of Changes* (earliest manuscripts date to the fourth century BCE) relied on hexagrams (composed of 1s and 6s or 1s and 8s to represent unbroken Yang or broken Yin powers). Although no stalks survive from Shang sites and we see no evidence of specific Yin and Yang numerology, mathematical analysis does suggest a sensitivity to categories of odd and even numbers and possibly simplified versions of what is known after the bronze age as the Da Yan 大衍 “Great Expansion” method of milfoil stalk cleromancy presumed to explain how the hexagrams in the *Book of Changes* were derived.⁶² The increasing appearance of numerical number series during the Western Zhou era suggests a rising popularity for stalk divination. Notably, archeological evidence for scapulimancy becomes extremely rare after the Western Zhou leading some scholars to assume that the use of turtles in divination disappears as the *Book of Changes* increased in popularity.⁶³ But problems with this assumption concern the dating of the *Book of Changes* as a text and the fact that transmitted texts continue to refer to the use of turtles. Recently excavated bamboo divination records dating to the fourth century BCE reveal that in the Chu

60 For example, see the Yi Hou Ze *gui* 宜侯矢簋, found in Jiangsu in 1954, in which divination is documented as part of establishing new Zhou territory and also of inscribing the record onto a bronze, or perhaps casting the bronze itself, see Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo, *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng*, No. 4320. The king divined at Yi, entering the land/Altar of Earth and facing south. The Xiao Yu *ding* 小盂鼎 vessel, originally from the Qi Mountain area, documents a ceremony involving the presentation of captives and officials (lined up to the east), with the king entering the shrine at dawn and facing south. The divination event was part of a larger sacrificial process involving communal drinking, invocations, animal sacrifice, libations, and gift-giving, see Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo, *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng*, No. 2839.

61 Hu *ding* 鬲鼎, a middle Western Zhou vessel from the Xi'an area, see Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo, *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng*, No. 2838.

62 Cook and Bréard, “Stalk and Other Divination Traditions,” 2022; Bréard and Cook, “Cracking bones and numbers.” The earliest mention of the Da Yan method is supposed to be in the “Appended Statements” (Xici 繫辭) commentary to the *Book of Changes*, but Edward Shaughnessy notes that the infamous description is actually missing from the 168 BCE copy of the *Xici* manuscript found in Mawangdui, Shaughnessy, “*I Ching*,” 21. See also Pu, *Chu zhushu “Zhouyi” yanjiu*, 596–611.

63 Some turtle shells used in divination during the Han and Tang periods have been found in peripheral regions such as Guangdong and Sichuan, Kalinowski, “Divination et astrologie,” 290; Kory, “Cracking to Divine,” 10 (fig. 3), 173 n. 142, 357 n. 98, 427–8.

cultural region in Hubei and Henan diviners continued to use turtle methods (four were named) and that the turtle methods were used first before the stalk methods.⁶⁴

The “predictive process” involved a member of the royal family, minister, or counselor consulting the bone on a particular future action or for a divine “charge” (*ming* 命) which might signal a curse or good fortune.⁶⁵ Both transmitted and newly recovered mortuary texts confirm that divination was also a medical diagnostic tool to determine the source of a curse, particularly in cases of illness (a form of iatromancy).⁶⁶ Whereas the transmitted texts record classic tales exemplifying specific political situations requiring an appeal to divination, the bamboo texts from the Chu region (from western Hubei eastward through Henan) record prolonged use of divination for individual cases over the course of the last three years of the patient’s or tomb occupant’s life. The aristocratic client asked a team of specifically named diviners to address concerns with his career, residence, and health. Each divination event began with turtle divination overseen by an expert in the specific method. There were numerous methods or styles. One record mentions that out of the ten different types of divination methods available, five involved turtles. They had names such as “Protecting Home” (*baojia* 保家), “Instructing Turtle” (*xunmin* 訓蜃), “Little Treasure” (*shaobao* 少寶), “Everlasting Numinous One” (*changling* 長靈), and “Mixed Numinous One” (*boling* 駁靈).⁶⁷ Sometimes a single event might require the use of both turtle and stalk divination methods in alternation.

The general format of the records written on bamboo strips did not vary according to the diviner and the method, although the specifics could vary. The divination performance clearly had roots traceable to the Shang.⁶⁸ But we also find a number of innovations. For example, in the divination of 318 BCE in early summer (the first divination of eight events over three years), the turtle method “Protecting Home” was employed to address the client Shao Tuo’s routine concerns regarding his health and career.⁶⁹

64 Kalinowski, “Diviners and Astrologers,” 345–6, 350; Yan, *Jianbo shushu*, 181; Chen, *Chudi chutu Zhanguo jiance*, examples with divination texts that include turtle techniques include Baoshan 包山 Tomb 2, 91–118, Wangshan 望山 Tomb 1, 270–86, Geling 葛陵 Tomb 1, 395–446.

65 Kalinowski, “Diviners and Astrologers,” 349–54; Kalinowski, “La rhétorique oraculaire,” 37–63.

66 Kalinowski, “Diviners and Astrologers,” 354–5.

67 Cook, *Death in Ancient China*, 101, 105–6. See p. 106, n. 84 for a few other names of methods found in more fragmentary texts.

68 Li, “Formulaic Structure”; Cook, *Death in Ancient China*, 102–4 (details); Kalinowski, “Diviners and Astrologers,” 382 (for a slightly more expanded classification of the rhetoric).

69 For detailed annotation of this passage, see Cook, *Death in Ancient China*, 154–7.

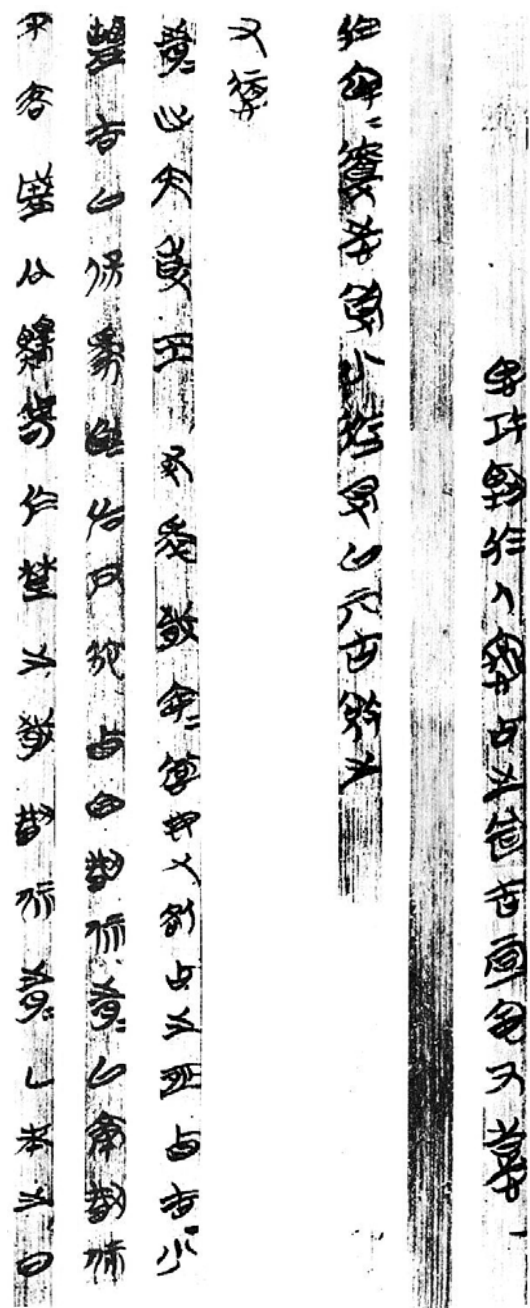


FIGURE 2.2 Baoshan divination bamboo strips number 197-98

ADAPTED FROM HUBEISHENG JINGSHA TIELU KAOGUDUI, ED., *BAOSHAN CHU JIAN* (BEIJING: WENWU, 1991), PLATE 88

During the year when the Song guest, Sheng Gong Bian, paid an official visit to Chu, on the month Xingyi (4), and the day Yiwei (32, s2 b8), Gu Ji used the Protecting Home method to test the divinatory proposal for Shao Tuo:

宋客盛公邊聘於楚之歲，刑夷之月，酤吉以保家爲左尹貞：

For a whole year, from one Xingyi month to the next, while serving the King, has Shao Tuo's person incurred any spiritual blame?

自刑夷之月以適刑夷之月，出內事王，盡卒歲，躬身尚毋有咎？

Prognosticating about it, the diviner notes that in the long term the results are auspicious but there remain some minor concerns with regard to his person and the fact that his (career) goals have been slow to come about.

占之，恒貞吉，少有憂于躬身，且志事少遲得。

In order to exorcise the source (of his concerns), the diviner focused his mind and attacked (the source) to release him from human harm (ghosts or witchcraft).

以其故脫之，思攻解于人害。

Prognosticating about it, the diviner confirmed that the results are above all auspicious and there will be happiness during this time.

占之，尚吉，其中有喜。

Basically, we see in this example, evidence of a preface, charge, prognostication and verification. In the preface, the year, lunar month, and sexagenary day (made up of specifically numbered stems and branches, “s” and “b”) are all noted along with the diviner's name, the method employed and the name of his client. The Shang oracle bone records never mentioned a method other than crack-making. The proposal being tested (the “charge”) was a routine query, much like the Shang diviners performed for the king every ten days or so. In later divination events performed for Shao Tuo over the next years, the queries would become more specific, especially as his health began to decline. The prognostication sections, although continuously proclaiming

auspiciousness, would propose various arrays of deities and types of sacrifice, including types of animal sacrifices, jade and other gifts. Also, the proposals could be performed in a three stage process including an initial proposal (*ju* 舉), succeeding (*yi* 翌), and confirmation (*zhuan* 轉) of an earlier diviner's results. Like the example above, exorcism rituals were performed to get rid of "harm" caused by spiritual blame, possibly with the use of implements such as peach wood arrows or lancet stones.⁷⁰ As with the Shang oracle bones, the most likely sources of harm were the most recently deceased ancestors. But the Chu diviners also took into account a vast range of environmental influences, including a polar god called Tai Yi 太一 and other deities of the built and wild spaces.⁷¹ After another prognostication to test the efficacy of the exorcism rituals, the procedure was verified as successful.

In Chu there was a fixed calendar of annual divination events, but if an acute condition emerged a special session was arranged. The influences of season, lunar month, and day signs were carefully calculated for the performance of divinations. Each divinatory proposal was focused on first locating and then either expelling or appeasing (with gifts and sacrifices) the unhappy spirit. The spirits included a hierarchy of near and distant ancestors, Chu founder deities, ghosts, earth and celestial spirits. Sacrificial offerings included an array of domestic animals differentiated by age, color, and gender. Some powerful nature deities received jade. Some spirits received items of clothing. Exorcism was particularly reserved for anonymous ghosts.⁷²

Although transmitted texts, such as the *Zhouli* (Rites of Zhou) and the *Shiji* (Records of the scribe), confirm the continued importance of bone – especially turtle bone – divination in courts, archaeological or other textual evidence of the practice confirm the rise of stalk divination practices, possibly a reflection of the overall decline in the integrity of royal houses during the Warring States.⁷³ Newly recovered texts, including some versions of transmitted texts, preserve tales of turtle divination. Some describe the fickle nature of the relationship between kings and their diviners, as well as the use of turtle divination. The Guodian 郭店 version of "Ziyi 緇衣" (Black

70 Cook, *Death in Ancient China*, 79–118; Kalinowski, "Diviners and Astrologers," 375–85; Lo, "Lithic Therapy."

71 See Cook, *Death in Ancient China*, 98–101.

72 Cook, *Death in Ancient China*, 102–4; Lai, *Excavating the Afterlife*, 25–54.

73 Kalinowski, "Diviners and Astrologers," 343–5; Pu, *Xian Qin bufu yanjiu*, 187, 345–50. A bronze inscription dating to the middle Western Zhou period, notes the use of stalk divination (*shi* 筮) on a road near a shrine, see the Shi Mao *hu* 史懋壺, *Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo, Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng*, No. 9714. For a lengthy and detailed study of pyro-plastronomy in Han and later times, see Kory, "Cracking to Divine."

Robes), now a chapter preserved in the *Liji* 禮記 (Ritual records), notes how the turtle can tire of “inconstancy” (*wangheng* 亡恆) on the part of the king and his diviner. A chaotic environment causes the turtle to lose its potency.⁷⁴ In an untransmitted tale, the Chu “turtle technician” (*guiyin* 龜尹) and “offering technician” (*liyin* 釐尹) try to help their sick king avoid an ancient and painful exposure ritual for resolving droughts by taking shortcuts.⁷⁵ While the truth of the oracle was not questioned, the reliability of the royal client and his diviners was once again in doubt. According to a recovered text preserved in the Shanghai Museum there were five taboos that must be followed in order to perform effective turtle worship: “When looking over the omen-cracks, do not discuss chaotic, private, destructive, exorcised, or short (things). These are the five taboos of tortoise (divination)” (臨兆 (written as 兆 + 卜) 不言亂、不言寢、不言滅、不言拔、不言短: 故龜有五忌.)⁷⁶ Daybooks also set hemerological based taboos for turtle divination on Zi (B1) and Chen (B5) Branch days.⁷⁷ Clearly, the performance of turtle divination required attention to the emotional atmosphere as well as to calendrical restrictions in order to be effective.

Transmitted texts dating from the third through first centuries BCE, such as the *Chunqiu Zuozhuan* 春秋左傳 (Zuo tradition of the *Spring and Autumn annals*), the *Zhouli* 周禮 (Rites of Zhou), and the *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the scribe), focus on the use of pyro-plastomancy for state level issues including war, the selection of the heir, official positions, illness, marriage, sacrifices,

74 The fourth century BCE Guodian version of “Ziyi” 繇衣 23 [strips 45–47] refers to tired turtles. The Master says: “The people of Song have a saying: ‘Those who lack constancy cannot be subject to divination.’ Are these indeed not words handed down from antiquity? If even the tortoise shell and milfoil stalks cannot comprehend them, how much less so than other men?! The *Ode* says: ‘Once our turtle has had enough, it informs us not what course to take’”. (Translation by Scott Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian*.)

子曰：「宋人有言曰：『人而無恆，不可以為卜筮。』其古之遺言與？龜筮猶弗知，而況於人乎？《詩》云：『我龜既厭、不我告猶。』」The ode “Min Tian” 旻天 (“Xiaomin” section) clarifies that the problem is a bad king with a disorderly court: “Our turtles are worn out, and will not report to us anything about the plans. There are a lot of counselors yet nothing is accomplished. The speakers fill the court, but who dares to take charge of the blame? It’s as if we encountered advice not to travel and can’t get on our way” (third stanza) 我龜既厭、不我告猶。謀夫孔多、是用不集。發言盈庭、誰敢執其咎。如匪行邁謀、是用不得于道。 See also Shaughnessy, *Rewriting Early Chinese Texts*, 63–93, esp. 79.

75 Ma, *Shanghai bowuguan*, 4: 194–201; Kalinowski, “Diviners and Astrologers,” 392–3; Lai, “*Jian dawang bo han de xushi jegou*”; Asano, “Shangbo Chu jian.”

76 *Tianzi jian zhou* (*The King establishes the continents*) 天子建州 Strip 11, Ma, *Shanghai bowuguan*, 6: 328–30.

77 Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian zhengli xiaozu, *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian*, 197, 241, 248.

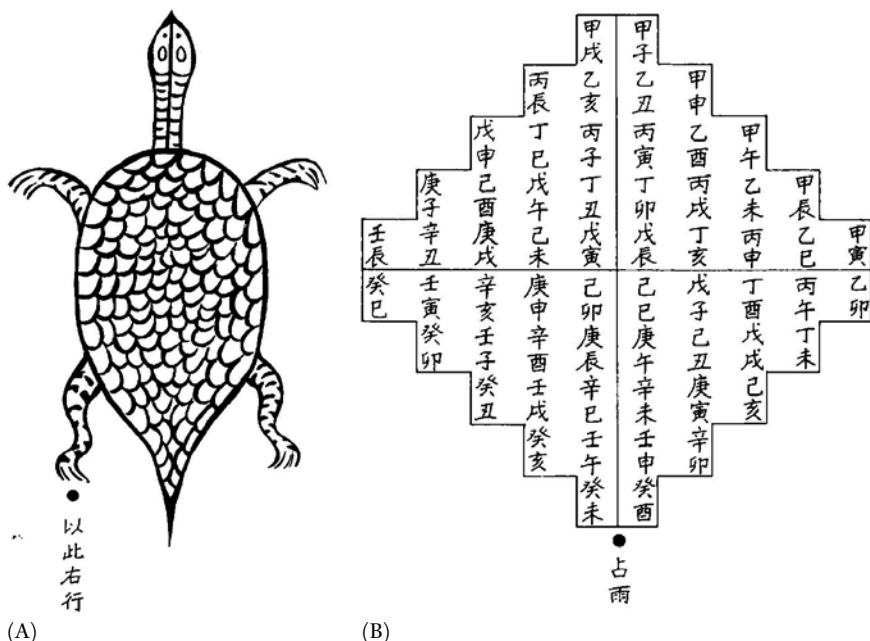


FIGURE 2.3 Line drawings of Yiwan turtle diagrams for catching thieves (A) or predicting rain (B)

ADAPTED FROM LIANYUNGANGSHI BOWUGUAN ET AL., *YINWAN HANMU JIANDU* (BEIJING: ZHONGHUA, 1997), 123–24

funerals, weather and harvests, astrological phenomena, or the movement of a capital.⁷⁸ The *Shiji* reveals additional Han period concerns such as dealing with prisoners, slaves, and bandits as well as predictions concerning future meetings, finding lost people, and wealth gain.⁷⁹ Some of these priorities, such as catching thieves, finding lost people, and weather prediction appear on a first century BCE divination board found in a Han tomb at Yiwan 伊灣 depicting two turtles, one drawn from an overhead perspective and including the outer shell and all appendages (rather than just a plastron), perhaps depicting a live rather than dead turtle. The other diagram was an abstract form of a plastron in which the scutes of the turtle body were filled in with day signs for counting and predicting rain.

78 Kalinowski, “Diviners and Astrologers,” 350; Kory, “Cracking to Divine,” 214–7. Burning whole turtles is mentioned in the transmitted *Yili* 儀禮, see Pu, *Xian Qin bufu yanjiu*, 199–200.

79 Kory, “Cracking to Divine,” 218–9. Some uses of pyro-plastronomy continue up through the Tang times, e.g. Divining dates or times, grave location and other sites, departures, careers, marriages, succession and military matters, and others (Kory, “Cracking to Divine,” 220–1, 237–8, 241–2 *passim*).

Eight sections of the outer periphery of the upper shell scutes on the diagram of a possible live turtle were counted clockwise beginning with the lower left foot and the number of days from the last new moon to predict whether a thief could be caught, the thief's family name, and what direction he or she went.⁸⁰

The indications of the eight sections of the turtle are somewhat map-like and follow the general directional correlations found in other diagrams, such as that of the human body in the fourth century BCE eight trigram divination text called the *Shifa* 筮法 (Stalk Divination Method). The Yiwan turtle correlations are as follows:

TABLE 2.1 The Yiwan turtle correlations

Left lower foot	Northeast	Possible
Left flank	East	Possible
Left upper foot	Southeast	Difficult
Head	South	No way
Right upper foot	Southwest	Difficult
Right flank	West	Possible
Right lower foot	Northwest	Easy
Tail	North	Return on own

The *Shiji* lists fifteen crack forms that sound a lot like movements of a living turtle, such as “head looks up and foot opens,” “foot withdraws and head looks up,” or “body is straight.”⁸¹ Some of these “omens” (*zhao* 兆) are also mentioned in the fourth century BCE bamboo manuscript *Book on Divining* (*Bu shu* 卜書) preserved in the Shanghai Museum. On the few remaining strips of this manuscript, the words of four turtle diviners are preserved. They describe and name the omens and then interpret the relative auspiciousness for occupying certain locations, such as moving into a residence or not, as well as dealing with larger political issues. Sometimes the colors of the omens were observed, including white, red, yellow, and black. After some warnings the scribe drew in an

80 Fodde-Reguer, “Divining Bureaucracy,” 67–70. The idea of using areas of a body in rotation according to day signs may have evolved out of the early imperial daybook use of human body diagrams to foretell the outcome of a birth. See for example, Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian zhengli xiaozu, *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian*, 254–5. See also the Jiudian 九店 Tomb 65 text “Zhan chuyu dao ji” 占出入盜疾, Chen, *Chudi chutu Zhanguo jiance*, 321–5.

81 See Kory, “Cracking to Diviner,” 254, 144–5, 445–6.

emphatic dot for punctuation.⁸² The text could be a manual of example divination rhetoric for would-be turtle diviners. We see sample divination results given in a stalk divination manual (the *Shifa*) of the same time period and preserved now in Tsinghua University.⁸³

The idea that turtles, when used during divination events, were energized with spiritual power by the early imperial age led to their complete reification as independent and eternal spiritual entities. They were referred to as “spirit turtles” (*linggui* 靈龜 or *shengui* 神龜). By Tang times, there are ten different types of turtles listed according their divine and other properties, such as site of origin or patterning. Parts of the turtle’s body correlated (through connected channels of *qi*) with parts of the human body, the Twenty-Eight Stellar Lodges, and the eight Trigrams. The turtle’s body represented the cosmos.⁸⁴ Spirit turtles are linked to the magical appearance of talismans given to worthy sages by the Yellow and Luo rivers.⁸⁵ Spirit turtles also appear along with other spirits conjured in medieval divination texts, such as those found at Dunhuang 敦煌, and in Daoist alchemy cults.⁸⁶

2 Stalk Divination: Cleromancy

Stalk divination involves the random sortilege of a certain number of plant stalks or bamboo rods to produce sets of numbers between 1 and 9 that are then read as meaningful units.⁸⁷ Number series have been recorded on oracle bones and other items since the Shang period.⁸⁸ Recent studies of

82 See Li Ling’s transcription and commentary in Ma, Shanghai bowuguan, 9: 291–302.

83 See the study by Cook and Lu, *Stalk Divination*.

84 Kory, “Cracking to Divine,” 64–5, 312.

85 Pregadio, *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, 13, 483–5.

86 See Dunhuang manuscript P2683r on good omens, part one is turtles, part two, dragons, three birds. Kalinowski, *Divination et société*, 458–61. A turtle spirit (*guishen*) is one of the spirits indicated in the dice text of Maheśvara (S5614) (for a full translation and study, see Dotson, Cook, and Lu, *Dice and Gods*, 2021).

87 It is possible that stalks were only one method of producing the numbers in the series. For example, bone and wooden multifaceted dice have been found in Warring States and Qin tombs. See, for example, Shandongsheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo, and Qingzhoushi bowuguan, “Zhanguo fajue jianbao,” 27, ill. 8, 29, ill. 67. See the discussion in Lewis, “Dicing and Divination.”

88 Cheng-lang Chang, “Divinatory Inscriptions”; Jao Tsong-I, “Tan jiaguwen (san)”; Cao, “Tao pai shang”; Pu, *Xian Qin bufa yanjiu*, 187–97; Jia, “Chutu shuzi cailiao”; Wang and Zhou, *Wanwu jie you shu*.

how these number series were produced suggest that they could be produced through a simplified version of sortilege methodology later associated with the *Book of Changes*, consolidated in the Han period. It also implies that over the course of history, this method was combined with other even quicker methods, such as that through the casting of dice or tokens.⁸⁹ Scholars have traditionally linked the number series to the *Changes* but recent discoveries challenge the historicity of that text. First, the number series preserved from the early bronze age do not have any reference to mantic image or *gua* 卦 names or to interpretative language similar to the *Changes*. The formation of a *gua*, that is, a series or vertical tower of numbers that were interpreted for mantic purposes, are key to stalk divination texts. The late bronze age preserved copies, on bamboo and silk, reveal differences in styles of *gua* creation, naming, and interpretation. Among these, a recovered text identified as the *Guicang* 歸藏 (Returning to be stored) shows the greatest similarity in terms of the names of the *gua* and the use of numbers symbolic of the broken and unbroken lines representing Yin and Yang as seen in the *Changes*. But the mantic text following the name of each hexagram is completely unfamiliar.⁹⁰ Although this text refers to the deified powers of Yin and Yang, other stalk divination texts of the time do not. This further confirms the failure of scholars who wish to link the early bronze age production of numerical series to the *Changes*.⁹¹ It seems that even during the Han period, when Yin and Yang powers were firmly established, alternative versions of the *Changes* still existed, some that reveal a focus on day signs and divination not seen in the transmitted *Changes*. This is the case with the version found in the late bronze age tomb of the short-lived Han emperor, Li He 李賀 (156–87 BCE).⁹²

Although the early bronze numerical series do show some connections to later *gua* – most consist of six digits and can be derived through primitive Da Yan style methods, we cannot confirm the numerological symbolism for their interpretation revolved around the binary agencies of odd and even. By the late bronze age, this binary symbolism is clear although what manual was used

89 See the study by Bréard and Cook, “Cracking bones and numbers.”

90 See Wang, “Wangjiatai Qin mu zhujian”; Shaughnessy, *Unearthing the “Changes”*; Cheng, “Jiben *Guicang* yuanliu lice.”

91 Xing, “Hexagram Pictures”; Li, “Shuzigua yu yinyang yao”; Zhang, “Shuzi gua yu zhanshi”; Li, “Qinghua jian Shifa”; Jia, “Qinghua jian *Shifa*”; Jia, “Shilun chutu shuzigua cailiao”; Zhou, “Lun ‘guan xiang xi ci’”; Chen, “‘Shuzigua’ kaobian”; Cook and Zhao, *Stalk Divination*, 13–9.

92 Jiangxisheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo, Nanchangshi bowuguan, and Nanchangshi xinjin-anqu bowuguan, “Haihun Hou mu,” 61. Other classics, such as the *Analects of Confucius* (*Lunyu* 論語), were found with it.

to read them is unclear. For example, if we examine fourth century BCE divination records from Chu, we find some record the production of *gua* written as two parallel columns of six numbers.⁹³ In these texts, five methods are named that scholars associate with stalk methods, although only three involved the recording of *gua*. The five methods are “Centering Stalks” (*yangshi* 央筮), “The Long and the Short” (*changxiao* 長削), “Uplifting Ascendancy” (*chengde* 承德), “Red Onion Grass” (*tongge* 彤荅), “Respecting Fate” (*gongming* 共命). The three methods that produce *gua* are “Centering Stalks,” “Uplifting Ascendancy,” and “Respecting Fate.” The diviners who specialized in these methods probably belonged to lineages of specialists.⁹⁴ Stalk divination was used to verify and extend the initiating turtle divination.⁹⁵

A newly discovered bamboo manual, which scholars simply refer to as the *Shifa*, has provided a potential key to unlocking how the Chu *gua* were read.⁹⁶ This text interprets the parallel number series as an array of four trigrams, with both the positions of the specific trigrams and their mantic relationships to each other (as defined by factors of gender, time, number, and image correlations). These identities and relationships are read to resolve concerns about all aspects of an elite male’s career, personal life, and health.⁹⁷ The manual rolled out as a single sheet composed of sixty-three-bamboo strips (fastened with three strings and a silk backing) for easy consultation. It featured sample interpretations on a range of different issues on one half and a diagram and charts of other factors to use in interpretation. The manual named eight *gua* agents that could indicate the sources of curses through canny equations on the part of the diviners. The names of the eight trigrams connect them to the formation and names of the hexagrams in the *Changes* tradition.

Instead of representing simplistic Yin and Yang values, the odd and even numbers of the trigrams result in gendered identities. The basic value of each trigram is whether it represents male or female agency. Other factors are secondary. Their array depicted around the human body is organized in a pattern

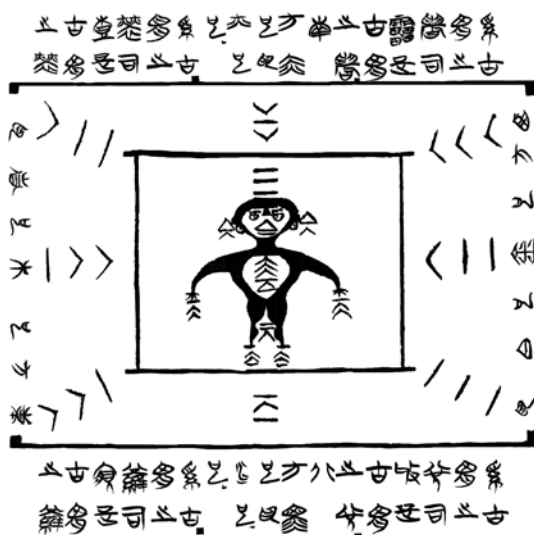
93 These have been collated in Pu, *Chu zhushu* “Zhouyi” *yanjiu*, 496–513.

94 See Cook, “Scribes, Cooks, and Artisans.”

95 Cook, *Death in Ancient China*, 101, 105–7. See the notes on p. 105 for explanations of loan words and readings. Kalinowski has shown that single diviners recorded in the *Zuozhuan* resorted to many different methods, “Diviners and Astrologers,” 371. For his discussion of the Chu records, see 374–85.

96 For application of the *Shifa* methodology to the Baoshan record of divination and sacrifice, see Ke Heli 柯鶴立 (C. A. Cook), “Shiyong Qinghuajian *Shifa* jiedu,”; Cook, “A Fatal Case of *Gu*.”

97 Cook and Zhao, *Stalk Divination*.



Translation:

Outer rim (clockwise from East, left side):

It is East, Wood, Green.

Why is it called Kan? The Supervisor of Planting is the reason.

It is South, Fire, Red.

Why is it called Zhen? The Supervisor of Thunder is the reason.

It is West, Metal, White.

Why is it called Dui? The Supervisor of Harvesting is the reason.

It is North, Water, Black.

Why is it called Li? The Supervisor of Storing is the reason.

Central rim (clockwise with 6s & 1s sequences named):

661 (Zhen), 116 (Xun), 616 (Kan), 666 (Kun), 611 (Dui),

111 (Qian)

161 (Li), 166 (Gen)

Inner square (outside from top to bottom, all male):

111 (Qian), 616 (Kan), 166 (Gen), 661 (Zhen)

(inside from top to bottom, all female):

611 (Dui), 666 (Kun), 161 (Li), 116 (Xun)

FIGURE 2.4 Section 24 from the *Shifa*IMAGE REDRAWN BY LALA ZUO FROM LI XUEQIN, ED., *QINGHUADAXUE CANG ZHAN'GUO ZHUJIAN*, VOL.4 (SHANGHAI: ZHONGXI, 2013), 76

that centuries later would become known as that of the King Wen Latter Heaven 文王後天 (versus the more commonly used Fuxi Ur-Heaven 伏羲先天 pattern). Since the eight trigrams were also positioned at different parts of the body (with female trigrams marking inner spaces and male trigrams outer spaces), it is likely that this diagram was used in medical diagnosis. Body diagrams in the *Shuihudi* 睡虎地 daybook, separated into Yin and Yang seasons, and marked around the outer rims with the Twelve Branch signs are slightly similar in design.⁹⁸ The difference is that the daybook versions do not distinguish an interior and are specifically used for predictions concerning birthing.

98 However, the *Shifa* specifies a method of fetal gender predication that is related to the positioning of the four trigrams, see Cook and Zhao, *Stalk Divination*, 105. For the *Shuihudi* diagram, see *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian xiao zhengli zu*, *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian*, 206. The twelve Branches mark different sections of the external body depending on two seasonal groups: (1) Winter and Fall, and (2) Summer and Spring. In the first group, the first Branch begins with the lower right leg (if we assume that the figure is facing the viewer) and the sequence moves clockwise around the figure. In the section group, it begins with the right hand. Areas of the outer body marked include head, shoulders, hands/arms, armpits, feet/legs, and crotch. See Kalinowski, "Hemerology and Prediction," 189, 201.

Chu diviners likely used an array of different divination techniques and manuals. For stalk divination, it is possible that they first performed trigram divination and then secondarily consulted hexagram texts. We have no proof of this other than the fact that both types of manuals for reading *gua* circulated among the Chu literati. It is unfortunate that the bamboo strips identified as the *Guicang* have rotted; the contents are preserved only in the notes of the director of the Jingzhou Museum 荊州博物館.⁹⁹ Discovered in 1993, over 800 fragments of bamboo texts were discovered in the inner coffin of a relatively small Qin era tomb near Jiangling, Tomb 15 in the burial ground in Wangjiatai 王家臺.¹⁰⁰ The *Guicang* was identified by comparing the contents with transmitted records of a *Guicang* discovered along with other texts in King Xiang of Wei's 魏襄王 (r. 318–296 BCE) tomb during the third century CE. The Wangjiatai bamboo texts included daybooks, legal statutes, medical texts, prohibitions regarding sacrifices, domestic animals, and a divination text for disasters and oddities.¹⁰¹ Also found in the tomb were implements for divining, possible associated with numerical *gua* production, such as bone tipped bamboo rods, dice, and a Dipper astrolabe. The *Guicang* seemed to consist of at least two copies broken up into 4000 pieces. Fifty-four different hexagram names were recovered (with sixteen duplicates). The *gua*, unlike the *Shifa gua* (which included numbers 1 (or 7), 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 – with an even/odd symbolic dichotomy) had already been reduced to Yin and Yang equivalencies, with number 1 (or 7) representing Yang (written 一), and 6 representing Yin (written へ).¹⁰² Each hexagram was followed by a mantic statement (*yue* 曰) which often quoted a divination record of “long ago” (*xi* 昔) or a line of song, sometimes based on the name of the hexagram.

99 Wang, “Wangjiatai Qin mu zhujian”; Wang, “*Guicang* yu Xia Qi.” See also Cook, “Myth and Fragments”; Ke Heli 柯鶴立 (C. A. Cook), “Zhao yu chuanshuo.” For a discussion of different *Guicang* schools, see Xing, “*Guicang* de fenpian.” For a recent translation and discussion of the entire text in English, see Shaughnessy, *Unearthing the “Changes”*.

100 For a description of the tomb, see Thote, “Daybooks in Archaeological Context,” 34–5. A number of game/divination boards were also found in the tomb, see Ai and Xing, *Xinchu jianbo yanjiu*.

101 The 101 strips of the disasters and oddities text are numbered but in extremely fragmentary condition at discovery, see Wang, “Wangjiatai Qin mu zhujian,” 47–8. Contents include events like the moon falling from the sky, a horse giving birth to a cow, trees coming to life in winter, wild animals entering the city or perhaps fighting with domestic animals, people dispersing from a city, outsiders coming in, etc. Wang Mingqin likened it to some texts by the Han divining specialist Jing Fang 京房 (77–37 BCE).

102 Many scholars understand the 一 to represent 9 as Yang lines are referred to as 9s in the *Yijing*.

The earliest *Changes* version known, dating to the Warring States, may also have come from the Chu region. It was one of many bamboo texts rescued by the Shanghai Museum from Hong Kong dealers after their illegal transport from an unknown tomb. Other slightly later versions have been recovered from Han tombs, such as the Mawangdui 馬王堆 silk version and a Fuyang 阜陽 bamboo version, both dating to the second century BCE, the former from a tomb in Changsha 長沙, Hunan and the latter from a tomb in Shuanggudi 雙古堆, Anhui. There is also the as yet unpublished version from the tomb of Li He mentioned above found in Haihunhou 海昏侯 Jiangxi. The Warring States Shanghai version includes only thirty-five hexagrams, but the basic structure of hexagram image, name, and statement followed by individual line statements is largely consistent with the Mawangdui silk version and the *Changes* tradition. Both the bamboo and silk versions reveal different orders to the hexagrams, some different wording and vocabulary, as well as a few other inconsistencies with the transmitted version.¹⁰³ Both texts (and the Fuyang version) also feature a numerology reduced to Yin (represented by signs for the number 8 八) and Yang (1 一). Curiously, as in the *Changes* tradition, the Yin lines are referred to as “6s” and the Yang lines as “9s.” In the *Changes* tradition 6 represents the zenith of Yin power and 9 of Yang power before the line must “change” (*bian* 變) into its opposing value. So, a maximum Yin would flip to a minimum Yang and vice versa. If the relative value of the gendered trigrams provided in one of the texts appended during the Han period to the *Changes* (*Shuogua* 說卦, Explaining the *gua*.) is factored in, then each stage of Yin and Yang has four stages represented by the four female and four male trigrams. Relative Yin or female powers, from weakest to strongest, with the 6 moving from the top to the bottom or occupying every line fully are: Dui 兌, Li 離, Xun 巽, and Kun 坤. For Yang and the 1 lines: Gen 艮, Kan 坎, Zhen 震, and Qian 乾. We see on the body illustration from the *Shifa* that Kun occupies the “heart” region and Qian the patriarchal top of the head. In this sense, the social and religious values of the trigram lines might be read along with the *Changes* tradition.

The most unique feature of the Shanghai version of the *Changes* is the addition of black and red colored images formed out of small squares and single square brackets, together or separately (in six different combinations), and most often added after the name of the hexagram, but also occurring at the end of the hexagram statement or of the entire line texts entry (followed by blank spaces). Scholars have various theories as to their meanings, such as indicators of Yin (black) and Yang (red) values of the hexagram

103 Pu, *Chu zhushu “Zhouyi” yanjiu*, 199–234.

or as a way of ordering the hexagrams, including paired hexagrams (that is two that reflect the opposite arrangement of lines from the other).¹⁰⁴

Other features of the Shanghai text include the fact that the word *zhen* 貞 was used with the original meaning of “to test a proposal, prognosticate” rather than as the later derived aspect of the Confucian code for elite behavior, “true, virtuous.”¹⁰⁵ This confirms observations drawn from the Fuyang text that the *Changes* was originally utilized as a divination manual rather than as a source of philosophical speculation. The Fuyang text is too fragmentary to reconstruct fully but it clearly uses the word “crack-making, divine” (*bu* 卜).¹⁰⁶

The Mawangdui tomb (Tomb 3) included a number of related texts for interpreting the *Changes*, only one of which has a transmitted version.¹⁰⁷ The *Changes* is on two pieces of silk with the text drawn between red lines (as if it were copied from a bamboo strip version) and the hexagrams displayed as two clearly separated but stacked trigrams above a black line at the top of the text.¹⁰⁸ Notably, the hexagrams are arranged according to their trigram order of Yang and Yin *gua* (which match the trigrams labeled male and female in the *Shifa*). So, for example, all the variations of hexagrams with Qian *gua* (written with three Yang lines) on top come first. The order of the Yang *gua* then proceed by groups of eight beginning with the *gua* with a Yang line on top (Gen), the Yang in the middle (Kan), and then on the bottom (Zhen). The order of the bottom *gua* of each group of eight alternates Yang and Yin pairs: Qian, Kun (all Yin lines), Gen, Dui (Yin line on top), Kan, Li (Yin line in the middle), Zhen, and Xun (Yin line on the bottom).¹⁰⁹ When all the trigrams were listed in charts in the *Shifa*, the order alternated between male and female pairs: Qian and Kun, Gen and Dui, Kan and Li, and Zhen and Xun. Once again, it is possible to compare the social and religious values of the trigrams in the *Changes* and the *Shifa* manuals even though the methodologies seem radically different.

A third methodology for producing numerical *gua*, but one representing a much simplified version of the Da Yan method, is described in a first century BCE stalk divination text, rescued from Hong Kong dealers and preserved in Beijing University. It calls itself the *Jingjue* 荊決 (訣) (Tricks of Jing), thus

104 Pu, *Chu zhushu “Zhouyi” yanjiu*, 8–9, 23–47.

105 Pu, *Chu zhushu “Zhouyi” yanjiu*, 48–50.

106 Shaughnessy, “Fuyang Zhou Yi”; Pu, *Chu zhushu “Zhouyi” yanjiu*, 513–46.

107 Xing, *Boshu “Zhouyi” yanjiu*; Pu, *Chu zhushu “Zhouyi” yanjiu*, 547–635; see Shaughnessy, “I Ching”.

108 See Chen, *Mawangdui boshu yishu*, 14, 190–1.

109 Xing, *Boshu “Zhouyi” yanjiu*, 66–75; Pu, *Chu zhushu “Zhouyi” yanjiu*, 549.

associating itself with Chu through the popular name of Jing.¹¹⁰ The method is explained at the beginning. The diviner faces east, holding the manual in his left hand (to the north) and thirty divining sticks in his right hand (to the south). He divides them randomly into three piles, which he stacks perpendicularly one on top of the other. Any of the three piles with more than four sticks, must have groups of four sticks subtracted from it until the remaining number is four or less. This way there are three piles, each limited to numbers between 1 and 4. The numbers are depicted as lines of rods and not numerically. These three line-ups compose a trigram, which is named according to 8 Stem and 8 Branch signs, a precursor perhaps to the more complex correlative system of hexagram lines and Stem and Branch signs called “inserting the Jia sign” (*najia* 納甲) divination system that appears in the later Han period. The *Jingjue* divination method and similar types of accompanying mantic texts appear in five different manuscripts in the Dunhuang collection. These texts adopt Zhou cultural names, *Guan Gongming bufa* 管公明卜法 (Method of Guan Gongming) and *Zhou Gong bufa* 周公卜法 (Method of the Duke of Zhou) and employ thirty-four not thirty stalks. The trigrams are not named after Stem and Branch signs but after legendary heroes and the eight trigrams. Vocabulary in some of the mantic statements, perhaps also to be understood as incantations or spells (*zhou* 呪), is similar for the same numerical trigrams and reveal some historical connection between the texts.¹¹¹ Notably, the medieval texts do not indicate the ghosts and spirits responsible for afflictions. Whether the method originated in the old Chu area is unknown.

The mantic statements are somewhat similar in structure to *Changes* style statements in that they often begin with an image, sometimes referred to scholars familiar with the *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of odes) as the *xing* 興 (“uplift, inspire”). The *Jingjue* does not include any texts interpreting individual lines. Many of the images recall those also found in the *Chuci* 楚辭 (Songs of Chu), *Shanhai jing* 山海經 (The classic of mountains and seas), the *Guicang* and

110 Beijing daxue chutu wenxian yanjiusuo, *Beijing daxue cang Xi Han zhushu*, 5: 169–77. The word *jing* could also refer to a burning poker used in turtle divination, but that does not seem relevant here. In fact, the text plays on the Han mystic of the earlier Chu. Zi Ju 子居 claims that it was the term used by the Qin for Chu, see Zi, “Beida jian *Jingjue* jixi.” Translation found in Dotson, Cook & Lu, *Dice and Gods*, 275–284.

111 Kalinowski, *Divination et société*, 301–68, esp. 316–8; Kalinowski, “La divination par les nombres,” 57–60; Kalinowski, “Mantic Texts,” 109–33, 116. Guan Gongming (209–56) is a Three Kingdoms period diviner and Zhou Gong is a legendary advisor to early Zhou kings towards the end of the eleventh century BCE. In a famous tale preserved in the *Shangshu* (and a slightly different version preserved in the Tsinghua Collection of bamboo texts), Zhou Gong divines about the health of the Zhou king. He also appears as a spirit in Confucius’ dreams 500 years later. For a recent study, see Zhou, “Shilun Beida Han jian *Jingjue*.” See study by Dotson, Cook, and Lu.

Changes to a small degree and the *Jiaoshi yilin* 焦氏易林 (correlations and sayings collected by a little known man named Jiao Gan 焦贛) to a greater degree. After the image, the text provides an abstract mantic statement that could relate to the client's concern and serve as a point of departure for the diviner's advice. This is followed by the general pronouncement of auspiciousness (or not) along with a list of potential sources of curses active that day and which rituals the person should perform or avoid. The list of spirits and demons mentioned include some that are found in earlier Chu texts, but also some either unknown or found in Qin and Han divination texts.¹¹² The mystique of Chu spirit worship, mentioned in Han texts as "lewd rites" (*yinsi* 淫祀), seems to have lent an air of magic to the divination rather than there being any true connection to earlier Chu style divination.

In the Beijing University collection of Han manuscripts, a fifty-one bamboo strip text called *Yu jiu ce* 禹九策 (The nine stalks of Yu) does not record any *gua* but instead discusses the values of numbers 1 through 9.¹¹³ In the introduction it states:

Use the nine stalks of Yu, the divining rod(s) of Huangdi, to divine about critical issue (or sacrifices) in the world. The modality of 3 for Yu and the modality of 5 for Huangdi covers all that is not auspicious in the world, no matter for whom or for what. Overall, with regard to auspiciousness, (the diviner) will get 3s, 1s, 5s, 9s or 7s, Display and Lift; If it is not auspicious, (the diviner) will get 2s, 4s, 6s, or 8s, Grief and Fear.

禹九策黃帝之支（枚）以卜天下之幾（機）。禹之三黃帝之五周於天下莫吉如若為某人某事。尚吉吉得三壹五九七陳頡不吉得二四六八空枯弔栗（悼慄？）

The text then proceeds to outline sets of issues that can be addressed with each number as well as to explain the special attributes of terms defining the relative auspiciousness of the numbers. These include Display and Lift, Grief and Fear, as well as Goodness (*shan* 善), Bad End (*ezhong* 惡終), and Empty and Withered (*kongku* 空枯), which seem to provide a secondary level of interpretation the texts linked to the numbers. Topics covered include the same range of daily worries seen in the *Shifa* and hemerology manuals. Some of

112 Some of the same spirits are indicated in the *Dream Divination Book* stored at Yuelu, Pang, "Yuelu shu yuan zang Qin jian (I): Zhan meng shu yanjiu," 214.

113 Li Ling 李零, presentation given at the Beijing Forum, January 30, 2016. The examples given here are from his transcription. Li, "Beida cang Qing jian Yu jiu ce."

the statements after the numbers included mantic images and list sources of courses. Because the images follow the verb “to say” (*yue* 曰), it is possible the image was in fact used as part of an invocation. Below is the last set of statements for the number 9. In fact, the numbers 7 and 9 each had two statements each, suggesting that these strips represent the combination of more than one manual. The first statement for 9 is:

A Nine, say “the yellow bird flying upside down.” There is someone coming, welcome him warmly. Auspicious. “The mountain has jujubes and pear fruiting but no flowers.” There is someone coming, such happiness could not be planned. Auspicious. One interpretation says “the Lone Child is obstinate making a well on a hill.” Suffering and then death, and afterwards eventually good fortune. One interpretation says the king’s body is without spiritual blame. There will be someone coming who will give me a pot of wine. Everyone will be feasting and happy. One interpretation says those assisting the center will celebrate (promotion); good scholars’ honest words, it is beneficial to use them to attack a city and to present a sacrifice. Inauspicious. Its curse will come from dead soldiers and people who die outside and from the mountain spirit. Inauspicious. The mountain spirit is the mountain ghost, and the Earth Altar ghost is the one beneath the big tree in the great ravine.

九曰：黃鳥翻翻兮有人將來甚心歡兮。吉。山有棗栗實而不華有人將來其喜毋圖。吉。一占曰：寡子徑徑（徑徑）於丘井。苦且死矣，後徐幸。一占曰：王本毋（無）咎。有人將來遭我壺酒莫不燕喜。一占曰：輔中有慶、良士之芴芴（諤諤）利以攻城以祠。兇。其崇兵死、外死者、及山神。兇。山神者即山鬼也，大谷大木下社鬼也。

It seems likely that this text was used in conjunction with another manual with numerical *gua* composed of odd and even numbers representing Yang and Yin values – although one problem with this idea is that it includes the numbers 2 and 3 which could only occur with a *Jingjue* type method or perhaps as the result of dice throws. In the *Shifa*, there is a list of “images” (*xiang* 象) that could be correlated with the numbers 4, 5, 8, and 9. These were numbers that turned up more rarely than the typical 1s (also representing 7s) and 6s and were omens with further implications. Interestingly, *Yu jiu ce* provides a number of interpretative readings for the appearance of a particular number, often combined with different images. It seems that diviners had a range of possible interpretations and external features they could combine to determine auspiciousness and to identify the influential spirits.

3 Neither Shells nor Stalks: Hemerology and Cosmographs

A critical shift in methodology is represented by the use of reference manuals or handbooks, diagrams and charts for calculating various factors in calendrical astrology. Any literate person capable of reading the handbooks and diagrams could use them but interpreting them might still require specialist knowledge.¹¹⁴ The handbooks, often accompanied by painted visuals (such as human and turtle body diagrams, or cosmic or game board style diagrams), included a range of different factors weighted differently for different uses and in variant forms, many associated with different units of time or astral bodies.¹¹⁵ Generally, the factors included cosmic influences, such as time (year, seasons, month, days, hours), space (directions), Stellar Lodges (*xiu* 宿), Stem and Branch signs, the Five Agents, Yin and Yang, and the stars of the Dipper.¹¹⁶ The manuscripts included daybooks (*rishu* 日書) and a variety of “cosmograph” or astrolabe style diagrams (and artifacts) (*shi* 式), some with explanatory manuals.¹¹⁷ People used these methods to determine the proper time for certain actions and to evaluate consequences.¹¹⁸ In addition, there were texts on planet, meteorological, musical note, and dream divination.

Daybooks reveal a lively cultural engagement of divination practices in daily life. The earliest example known dates to the late Warring States and attests to even earlier practices. The continuity of these practices extends into the medieval period as evidenced by many examples in the Dunhuang materials, and beyond.¹¹⁹ A recent survey of ancient Chinese daybooks and related material lists twenty-nine texts, most dated to the Han period.¹²⁰ They were written primarily on bamboo strips, but also on wooden planks and on silk (such as the Zidanku manuscripts).¹²¹ Some excavated and important examples include bamboo texts from the Warring States Jiudian 九店 Tomb 56 in the Jiangling region of Hubei and from the Qin tombs in Shuihudi in Yunmeng 雲夢, Hubei,

114 See Harper's discussion on manuscript culture, in “Daybooks.”

115 Huang, “*Rishu*” *tuxiang yanjiu*.

116 The astral lodges may have been an aspect of divination since the fifth century BCE when they were found written painted on the lid of a lacquer vessel around the Dipper buried in the tomb of Zeng Hou Yi 曾侯乙 in Suixian 隨縣, Hubei in 443 BCE.

117 See Li Ling's discussion of the *Shi* diagram, Li, “The Zidanku Silk Manuscripts,” 272. He describes the transition to *shi* style divination a “revolution,” Li, “Shuo shushu geming.”

118 A complete study is to be found in Harper and Kalinowski, *Books of Fate*.

119 Harper and Kalinowski, *Books of Fate*, 57–206; Kalinowski, *Divination et société*, 213–99, 558–612.

120 Harper and Kalinowski, *Books of Fate*, 439–42.

121 See Li, “The Zidanku Silk Manuscripts,” 249–77.

dating to 217 BCE, and in Fangmatan 放馬灘 in Tianshui 天水, Gansu, dating to between 230–220 BCE.¹²²

The Jiudian daybook comprised the majority of what was once 205 bamboo strips rolled together and placed in a side niche. From the fragments, the recovery team divided it into fifteen topics which seem to form a basic core for what is found in the often more complex Qin and Han versions. One signature feature of the daybook is a system of twelve special names for days used to determine the auspiciousness of certain actions, generally called Establish and Remove (*jian chu* 建除) after the names of the first two days.¹²³ Later versions include another set of determining day signs, known as the Collected Branches (*congchen* 叢辰) method consisting of eight special day names that rotate according to the lunar month.¹²⁴ Both sections were used to determine the best days for daily human activity, including rituals, traveling, marriage, movement of animals, goods or peoples, construction, legal, military, and official matters, funerals, and much more.¹²⁵ The Jiudian text categorizes the determinations by the twelve months beginning in Spring, the fourth month of the Chu calendar system. Later Daybooks use the Qin or later calendars.¹²⁶

The utilization of space in the daybooks often involved squeezing lists, charts, and other texts and diagrams into adjacent multilayered registers.¹²⁷ A number of different systems are presented side-by-side enabling a diviner to verify his results using more than one method, each employing different sets of variables. Some of these systems include “Orphan-Empty” (*guxu* 孤虛), “Yu’s Split-up Days” (*yu liri* 禹離日), “Root Mountain” (*genshan* 根山), “Inspection” (*lin* 臨), “Corpse-Ghost” (*shi chi* 失魃), “Dark Dagger-Ax” (*xuange* 玄戈), “Emperor” (*di* 帝), “Punishment-Virtue” (*xingde* 刑德), “Reverse Branch” (*fanzhi* 反支), and “Dipper Establishment” (*doujian* 斗建). Some texts include musical pitch-standards and weather divination factors.¹²⁸ Similar

122 Chen, *Chudi chutu Zhanguo jiance*, 301–8. See Alain Thote’s descriptions of the archaeological contexts for these and other examples in Thote, “Daybooks in Archaeological Context.”

123 See Harper and Kalinowski, *Books of Fate*, 464–5 for a discussion of the Chu, Qin, and later variants.

124 Harper and Kalinowski, *Books of Fate*, 460.

125 Kalinowski lists 33 different types of activities, see Kalinowski, “Hemerology and Prediction,” 194–8. Jiudian strips 45–49 concern a type of early geomancy, specifically how the auspicious nature of a building’s position within the four directions might affect life inside.

126 Liu, “Daybooks,” 88; see Cullen, “Calendars and Calendar Making,” 292–6.

127 See Liu, “Daybooks,” for schemata of the Shuihudi (fig 2.3) and Fangmatan (fig 2.4) almanacs.

128 This list and the translations are drawn from Harper and Kalinowski, *Books of Fate*, 460–76.

systems found in different texts might be applied to different issues. For example, the “Orphan-Empty” system is used for marriage, demonography, or thievery in three versions.¹²⁹ Basically, the Orphan-Empty system used the two remaining Branch signs (out of twelve) left over after each decade of matching the Ten Stem stems. If we understand as S 1–10 as a “decade” then we see that B₁₁ and B₁₂ are “orphaned” in this decade. “Empty” branches are the fifth and sixth B of each S decade, so B₅ and B₆ of the first of six S₁ decades, B₃ and B₄ of the second and so forth. Orphan and Empty branches were “opposite” each other in a spatial version of the diagram.¹³⁰

TABLE 2.2 Reference table for Stem and Branch signs in numerical order

S ₁ B ₁	S ₂ B ₂	S ₃ B ₃	S ₄ B ₄	S ₅ B ₅	S ₆ B ₆	S ₇ B ₇	S ₈ B ₈	S ₉ B ₉	S ₁₀ B ₁₀
S ₁ B ₁₁	S ₂ B ₁₂	S ₃ B ₁	S ₄ B ₂	S ₅ B ₃	S ₆ B ₄	S ₇ B ₅	S ₈ B ₆	S ₉ B ₇	S ₁₀ B ₈
S ₁ B ₉	S ₂ B ₁₀	S ₃ B ₁₁	S ₄ B ₁₂	S ₅ B ₁	S ₆ B ₂	S ₇ B ₃	S ₈ B ₄	S ₉ B ₅	S ₁₀ B ₆
S ₁ B ₇	S ₂ B ₈	S ₃ B ₉	S ₄ B ₁₀	S ₅ B ₁₁	S ₆ B ₁₂	S ₇ B ₁	S ₈ B ₂	S ₉ B ₃	S ₁₀ B ₄
S ₁ B ₅	S ₂ B ₆	S ₃ B ₇	S ₄ B ₈	S ₅ B ₉	S ₆ B ₁₀	S ₇ B ₁₁	S ₈ B ₁₂	S ₉ B ₁	S ₁₀ B ₂
S ₁ B ₃	S ₂ B ₄	S ₃ B ₅	S ₄ B ₆	S ₅ B ₇	S ₆ B ₈	S ₇ B ₉	S ₈ B ₁₀	S ₉ B ₁₁	S ₁₀ B ₁₂

Later medieval practices associated with Daoism employed a Hidden Stem (*dunjia* 遁甲) method in combination with star treading rituals, such as Walking the Guideline of Dipper Stars (*bugang* 步罡), Paces of Yu (*yubu* 禹步), or even involving the Twenty-Eight Stellar Lodges. Through calculations using day signs outside of the sexagenary calendar, practitioners could escape through the “irregular gate” (*qimen* 奇門) and exist outside visible reality.¹³¹ Early forms of some of these magical choreographies are traceable to the Qin daybooks.¹³²

Manuals for day calculation included the Root Mountain diagram, which was used to find Yu’s split-up days (calculated by the arrays of day signs on an upside-down mountain-like trapezoid with two clear halves that split up some of the combinations). Some of the diagrams begin with the S₁ decades and others with days of the new moons.¹³³ Another hemerological system involved Red Emperor (Chidi 赤帝) inspection days (days of potential calamity) which reached greater maturity in medieval times. The Red Emperor was

129 Harper, “Daybooks,” 143.

130 Harper, “Daybooks,” 133–6; Kalinowski, “Hemerology and Prediction,” 161–2.

131 Pregadio, *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, 1: 237–9.

132 Harper “Daybooks,” 130–3.

133 Cheng, “Liushi jiazi shuaifen shushu” 4: 433–8; Kalinowski, “Hemerology and Prediction,” 184–7; Huang, “*Rishu*” *tuxiang yanjiu*, 122–30.

one of five color-identified deities representing aspects of the Five Agents.¹³⁴ The Corpse-Ghost system also persisted into later times. The most primitive version correlated the Twelve Branch signs with directions and the twelve months (numbered in parenthesis in the chart below) to indicate where and when the virulent ghost of a recently buried person might reappear. Later versions include sophisticated calendars and “rooms” marked that indicate times and places when the ghost may or may not appear over the course of a year.¹³⁵

TABLE 2.3 Death-ghost appearances by time and space

B8 (6)	SOUTH	B9 (7)	B10 (8)
B7 (5)	B6 (4)	B5 (3)	WEST
EAST	B3 (1)	B4 (2)	B11 (9)
B2 (12)	B1 (11)	NORTH	B12 (10)

The Punishment-Virtue system also measures the auspicious and inauspicious qualities of each day and month based on the winter and summer solstices and the relative lengths of day and night over the course of a year. A spatial dimension, in which the Punishment or Virtue days (measure the relative depletion or accretion of Yang *qi*) affect different sectors of the domestic residence on different days. The Reverse Branch hemerology determines auspicious and inauspicious days according to a system counting from the new moon day of each month.¹³⁶ These texts represent a sample from the miscellanea of hemerological related manuals.

The Dipper Establishment method uses the three stars of the handle as viewed near the horizon at dusk to order the succession of months in various systems, such in the Day Court (*Riting* 日庭) diagram. The first month was understood to begin at Branch Yin, B3, marking a northeastern-eastern position and the beginning of spring. The Day Court diagram, like many cosmographs, featured “cords” and “hooks” delimiting the cosmic spaces and their correlations with the five seasonal periods, Five Agents, Twelve Branches, and Twenty-Eight Stellar Lodges (which mark the solar stations).¹³⁷ The Day Court model had many spin-offs including the Dark Dagger Ax and Emperor

134 Harper, “Daybooks,” 122–7.
135 Huang, “*Rishu*” *tuxiang yanjiu*, 185–200; Kalinowski, “Hemerology and Prediction,” 190–1; Yan, “Daybooks and the Spirit World,” 216–20.
136 Harper and Kalinowski, *Books of Fate*, 465–68.
137 Kalinowski, “Hemerology and Prediction,” 162–7, 179–84. Cullen, *Heavenly Numbers*, 33–4. Cullen explains that in the early Han period, astronomical calculations did not really distinguish the tropical from sidereal year.

methods. The former used the Stellar Lodges to indicate auspicious times and the later marked days to avoid for certain activities. The conjunctions of the spiritual agencies of units of time (Year, Lunar Month, Day, and Hours), direction (and/or Five Agents), and astral bodies become increasingly valent in the early imperial era. Scholars classify the manuals and diagrams focusing on various combinations of these factors as representing cosmograph or *shi*-style methods, often but not exclusively reflecting a cord and hook pattern in a round or square parameter, with the cord and hooks delimitating and interior space with four gates, for Heaven, Earth, Humans, and Ghosts.¹³⁸

The actual instrument called a *shipan* 式盤 consisted of a round plate over the Day Court depicted as a square region. The plate and the square featured different sets of factors that were correlated as the plate turned. A famous Han example is that from Shuanggudui 雙古堆 found in Fuyang, Anhui.¹³⁹ The round plate features the dipper in the center surrounded by numbers 1–10 and the Twenty-Eight Stellar Lodges going counter-clockwise. The static square region features arrays of the Stems, Branches, and again the Stellar Lodges. Other divinatory diagrams, called Boju 博局, a square (named Fang 方) instead of a circle covers the center of an array of cords and hooks shaped into T's L's and V's (a TLV pattern also found on the backs of Han mirrors) marked in places with the sixty day signs. The manual with the Yinwan 尹灣 version (discovered in Yinwan Tomb 6 in Lianyungang 連雲港 city of Jiangsu of 11 BCE) notes that the diagram could be used to catch thieves and resolve many issues of daily concern.¹⁴⁰ Game versions, also called Liubo 六博 boards, mark strategic regions with special names, four in the “T” outside the central square, four in the corner boxes and four in the hooks marking each side.¹⁴¹ A forty-nine bamboo strip version calling itself a *Liubo* 六博 exists in the Beijing University collection of Han texts and mentions its application for decisions involving

138 Huang, “Shitu yu shipan”; Huang, “*Rishu*” *tuxiang yanjiu*, 28–108. The four gates are mentioned on Han and later versions. Huang, “*Rishu*” *tuxiang yanjiu*, 80–4. For medieval versions, see Kalinowski, “Instruments astro-calendériques,” 368–74.

139 See Kalinowski’s illustrations and discussion, in “Hemerology and Prediction,” 164–7.

140 Fodde-Reguer, “Divining Bureaucracy,” 71–5, 129–31. There are seven stylistic versions evident in excavated game boards. The earliest do not feature a central square. See Huang, “*Rishu*” *tuxiang yanjiu*, 149–68, esp. 153–61.

141 Zeng, “Yinwan Han mu *Boju zhan* mudu shijie”; Li, “Yinwan Han mu ‘*Boju zhan*’ mudu shijie dingbu.” Recently a bamboo strip handbook of rules for playing the game was found in the Haihun Hou 海昏侯 tomb near Nanchang 南昌, Jiangxi, dated to 87 BCE. For a discussion on mutual roots of divination and gambling, see Li, *Zhongguo fangshu xukao*, 15–20. For a recent study on the game in the context of feasting, see Selbitschka, “A Tricky Game.”

marriage, finding escaped slaves, illness, meetings, and one's career.¹⁴² Another hemerological divination diagram that was later converted into a game is Heavenly Jail (*tianlao* 天牢). Related to the later Official Promotion (*shengguan* 升官) game, it originally consisted of five concentric circles marked with the sixty day names.¹⁴³

During the Han, one of the lodges associated with the time of the winter solstice, such as Dipper (*dou* 斗), was set as the "establishment star" (*jianxing* 建星).¹⁴⁴ A first century BCE bamboo text in the Beijing University collection that labels itself *Kanyu* 堪輿 (Canopy and chassis) – presumed to symbolize the round Heaven plate over the square Earth region¹⁴⁵ – provides a hemerological guide that divides the days marked by the Twelve Branch signs in different arrangements under the twelve lunar months according to the four stars of the Dipper Cup and to different sets of the Stellar Lodges according to the three stars of the Dipper Handle.¹⁴⁶ The first thirteen strips of this seventy-nine-strip text essentially provide a diagram that could function much like a Dipper astrolabe for calculating the auspicious times of the year (*sui* 歲) controlled by the stars, seasons, days, and so forth. These would continue to be important in medieval divination and Daoist ritual which added two invisible stars, making the total nine. The Han manual was used like a daybook to determine auspicious times for activities such as rituals, military actions, travel in particular directions, and finding escapees. The chart in the first thirteen strips consists of seven registers. The first register lists the lunar months (read left to right).

142 Chen, "Beida Han jian shushulei."

143 Cheng, "Liushi jiazi cuifen shushu," 438–41; Kalinowski, "Hemerology and Prediction," 188; Huang, "*Rishu*" *tuxiang yanjiu*, 139–42. For a discussion of a version preserved in the Beijing University Han bamboo texts collection, see p. 142, a medieval version from Dunhuang, p. 143. See Morgan, "The Chinese Game of *Shengguan tu*."

144 Cullen, *Heavenly Numbers*, 99 n. 27. Cullen, *The Foundations of Celestial Reckoning*, 150, 364–7, 381–2, 405, 418.

145 *Kanyu* texts were previously only from Tang and Song records and as for geomancy. The original scribe of this copy titled it "*Kanyu*" and specified that it was just the first of others in a series ("number one" 第一) that did not seem to survive. For a translation of the title, see Liu, "Daybooks," 59. The earliest texts that mention this term are the *Shiji* and the "Tianwen" chapter of the *Huainanzi*. See Loewe, *Divination, Mythology and Monarchy*, 112–20.

146 Beijing daxue chutu wenxian yanjiusuo, *Beijing daxue cang Xi Han zhushu*, 5: 131–43. An earlier system of marking dipper "strikes" (*ji* 繫) marking twelve hour periods (instead of twenty-eight as in the Zhoujiatai 周家臺 Twenty-Eight Stellar Lodge divination manual) is found in the Kongjiapo 孔家坡 daybook, see Kalinowski, "Hemerology and Prediction," 181–3. Li Ling notes the similarity to a Mawangdui text called the Yin Yang Wuxing 陰陽五行, version A, see in Li, "The Zidanku Silk Manuscripts," 273.

B = Branch and X = Stellar Lodge (*xiu*).¹⁴⁷ DB = Dipper Bowl Star and DH = Dipper Handle star.¹⁴⁸ 1–12 = the numbers of the lunar months. The arrow indicates the direction for counting Branch days or hours.

TABLE 2.4 *Kanyu* corrections

12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
B12	B1⇒	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6	B7	B8	B9	B10	B11	DB1
B8	B7	B6	B5	B4	B3	B2	B1⇐	B12	B5	B4	B3	DB2
B1⇒	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6	B7	B8	B9	B10	B11	B12	DB3
B11	B12	B1⇒	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6	B7	B8	B9	B10	DB4
X13	X10	X8	X20	X17	X15	X27	X24	X22	X6	X3	X1	
X14	X11	X9	X21	X18	X16	X28	X25	X23	X7	X4	X2	
	X12			X19			X26			X5		
DH3	DH2	DH1	DH3	DH2	DH1	DH3	DH2	DH1	DH3	DH2	DH1	

From the text that follows the diagram, we understand that lunar months 1–3 are Spring and East, 4–6 are Summer and South, 7–9 are Autumn and West, and 10–12 are Winter and North.¹⁴⁹ Dipper Bowl star 1 establishes the year and the first Branch day (*zi* 子) is in the eleventh lunar month. The second Dipper Bowl star (DB2) reveals a reversal of influences (the Branches go in the opposite direction than for the other stars); also, Branch 3, 4, and 5 (Yin, Mao, and Chen) are repeated for the spring where we would expect to find Branches 9, 10, and 11 (Shen, You, Xu). The Stellar Lodge arrangement follows that of the Han correlations to seasons and directions. Underneath the twelve lunar month numbers

147 Following the system in Harper and Kalinowski, *Books of Fate*, tables 4 and 7, xx–xxii. Some of the names of the lodges slightly vary.

148 Dipper Bowl stars, 1 Yanri 厭日 (the “founding yin” 建陰 star), 2 Chong 衝 (opposite of Yanri), 3 Wuyao 無堯 (after Yanri), 4 Xian 陷 (before Yanri). Dipper Handle Stars are 1 Yanheng 掩衡, 2 Zheheng 折衡, and 3 Fuheng 負衡. The handle stars mark the seasons. The four stations of Sui (Year) are Sui in Position 歲位 (East), Sui in Behind 歲後 (North), Sui in Front 歲前 (South), and Sui in Opposition 歲對 (West), see Beijing daxue chutu wenxian yanjiusuo, *Beijing daxue cang Xi Han zhushu*, 5: 132–3, 230. In the *Taboo Days* (*Jiri* 忌日) texts in the Beida collection, there are four different Heng 衡 names for parts of the Dipper handle. The names for the Dipper stars are different in the *Shiji*, which David Pankenier translates as Bowl Pivot (Kui shu 魁樞), Gyrator (Xuan 旋), Jade Device (Ji 璣), Balance Weight (Quan 權), Balance Arm (Heng 衡) Yang Initiator (Kaiyang 開陽), Twinkling Brilliance (Yaoguang 耀光) (see Pankenier, *Astrology and Cosmology*, 271, 460–1). The seven stars in the Shuanggudui astrolabe are marked but not named.

149 This accords with other Han systems, see Harper and Kalinowski, *Books of Fate*, Table 7.

are four registers of differently arrayed Branch signs assigned to each of the four Dipper spirits in different months. There are four regions of Year (Sui) which determine auspiciousness for different ranks of people.¹⁵⁰ The last section of the Beijing text, strips 46–74 include historic examples of Chu officers using the method in the thirteenth year of King Dao 悼 (389 BCE) suggesting that this is in fact a Warring States method although nothing similar has been found in a Chu tomb. The manual claims to follow the Zhuanxu system (Zhuanxu li 顓頊曆), named after a legendary sage-emperor Zhuanxu, a system which may date only as early as the Qin but may actually have been popular during the Eastern Han.¹⁵¹

This system may underlie the Five Planet divination system. Prognostication based on the five planets (Jupiter, Mars, Saturn, Mercury, and Venus) can be traced back to the late Warring States. The earliest text dedicated to this type of divination is the *Wuxingzhan* 五星占 (Five Planet Prognostication) discovered in Tomb 3 at Mawangdui 馬王堆 in Changsha, Hunan which was closed in 168 BCE.¹⁵² Each planet is introduced along with its correlations to the Five Agents and named spirits, including legendary sage-emperors and other spirits. For example, Jupiter, *sui* 歲, is associated with the East, Wood, sage-emperor Da Hao 大皞, and the spirit Goumang 勾芒. Jupiter and Venus (*taibai* 太白) are given more attention than Mars (*yinghuo* 熒惑), Saturn (*zhenxing* 鎮星), or Mercury (*chenxing* 辰星).¹⁵³ The predicted movement of the planets in space are charted according to regions of the sky marked by the successive degrees of the Stellar Lodges along a rough equatorial line.¹⁵⁴ Any appearance of unexpected astral phenomena was evaluated for its auspicious or inauspicious nature according to the reference system of astral spaces corresponding to terrestrial geography (*fenye* 分野), stars to leaders (as in Jupiter to the king),

150 Going from Month 1 to Month 12, we see that the branch sequence of star DB1 Yan begins with 11 running backwards to 1 until Month 12 which has Branch 12; The star DB2 Chong Branch sequence has an odd pattern of 3–5, 12, 1–2, 9–11, 6–8; The star DB3 Wuyao is simply backwards 12–1, and the star DB 4 Xian begins with 10 going backwards to 1 but Months 11 and 12 correlate to Branches 12 and 11.

151 Cullen, “Understanding the Planets,” 250. In a later book, Cullen suggests that the six ancient systems, the Zhuanxu including, may have been later fabrications, see Cullen, *Heavenly Numbers*, 33–4, 113–8, 312.

152 Cullen, “Understanding the Planets.”

153 Cullen, “Understanding the Planets,” 221; on Goumang as grim reaper, see Riegel, “Kou-mang and Ju-shou.”

154 Cullen, “Understanding the Planets,” 226–8. Cullen notes that the ecliptic as an astronomical concept that had not yet emerged when this manuscript was composed.

and so forth.¹⁵⁵ Another text from the same tomb known as the *Tianwen qixiang zazhan* 天文氣象雜占 (Assorted astronomical and meteorological prognostications) is essentially a chart of celestial omens, such as different shaped comets or certain cloud formations, that could be used to predict the success of military ventures. Military divination based on the analysis of meteorological or manifestations of cosmic vapor, *qi*, is also found in the Punishment-Virtue text from the same tomb. Tombs dating to around 134–118 BCE in Yinqueshan 銀雀山, near Linyi 臨沂 in Shandong included military and Yin-Yang divination texts.¹⁵⁶

Among classificatory systems used in ancient divination besides those temporal and astral ones mentioned above, there were also cyclical animals, the five notes, and the twelve pitch standards.¹⁵⁷ The twelve pitches, for example, denoted by the names of bell sounds, correlated to the time periods of the day. Three bell sounds together and expressed numerically could be read as a fortune-telling *gua*.¹⁵⁸ The earliest version of the system is in the Qin period Fangmatan daybooks, but similar more complete systems are also described in the “Yueling 月令” (Monthly ordinances) chapter of the *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (Master Lü’s Springs and Autumns) and a number of Han texts (such as *Huainanzi* 淮南子). It is possible that at the outset of the divination procedure dice or tokens were cast to determine the input data,¹⁵⁹ which were either of calendrical or of harmonic type. Through a system of numerical correlations, the data was converted to three numbers, which were then, through an unknown process, combined into a single figure. Finally, after some rounding up or down, one obtained one of the twelve numbers associated with the twelve pitch standards. Again, lists of predictions correlating to these numbers gave the mantic interpretation according to the time of divination.

In general, the transmitted correspondence systems involved correlations of the 12 seasonal aspects, 12 hour times, 12 animals and 12 pitches with 5 groups of 2 stem signs each, 6 groups of two Branch signs each, 5 groups of seasonal

155 Pankenier, “Characteristics of Field Allocation”; Pankenier, *Astrology and Cosmology*, 261–98.

156 Harper, “Ma-wang-tui Silk Scroll Book”; Yates, “The Yin-Yang Texts from Yinqueshan,” 80–1; Kalinowski, “The *Xingde* 刑德 Texts from Mawangdui”; Yates, “The History of Military Divination.”

157 Harper and Kalinowski, *Books of Fate*, 468–75. On casting tokens, see Chen, “Fangmatan Qin jian rishu.”

158 This section on the twelve pitch divination has been extensively revised by Andrea Breárd.

159 Gansusheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo, *Tianshui Fangmatan Qin jian*, 97–100; Dai, “Shixi Qin jian *Lü shu*”; Gu, “wuxing, sishi, yinlü duiying shuo”; Gu, “Cong gudai yinyang wuxing,” 139–47; Fang, “Qin jian *Lü shu* shenglüfa”; Kalinowski, “Théorie musicale.”

spirits, 5 notes (*yin* 音), 5 mantic numbers (5 to 9), 6 mantic numbers (4 to 9), 5 locations around the residence, and the 5 viscera.¹⁶⁰ Mantic numerical values are assigned to the five notes and the pitches. The text explains that three pitches produce a divinatory sequence, a *gua*. Numbers assigned to the 12 pitches (referred to as *lü* 律, although the Fangmatan also refers to the 12 *sheng* 聲) result from musical arithmetical proportions related to the division of the chord.

A complete set of possible correlations (drawn from transmitted sources and the Fangmatan daybook) can be mapped out as follows:

1. The seasons are C = Chun (Spring), X = Xia (Summer), Q = Qiu (Fall), D = Dong (Winter). The Fangmatan uses the Five Agents instead of Seasons, correlated to one Stem and one branch as well as different hour sets of the day.
2. The spirits in the transmitted texts linked to the pitch standards are DH GM = Da Hao 大皞 and Goumang 勾芒, YD ZR = Yandi 炎帝 and Zhurong 祝融, HD HT = Huangdi 黃帝 and Houtu 后土, SH RS = Shao Hao 少皞 and Rushou 蓐收, ZX XM = Zhuanxu 顓頊 and Xuanming 玄冥. The Fangmatan has differently named spirits: Keshan 課山, San'a 參阿, Tanggu 陽 (湯) 谷, Sushan 俗山, Chandu 臯都, Hunyang 昏陽, Binghe 并閼. Essentially, one spirit covers two pitches, although this is inconsistent and some slips are missing information.¹⁶¹
3. The tones (*yin* 音) are G = Gong 宮, S = Shang 商, J = Jue 角, Z = Zhi 徵, and Y = Yu 羽. In Fangmatan, they are linked to mantic numbers 1, 3, 5, 7, 9.
4. The pitches by Western chromatic scale notes are F (fa) = *huangzhong* 黃鐘, F[#] (fa[#]) = *dalü* 大呂, G (sol) = *taicu* 太簇, G[#] (sol[#]) = *jiazhong* 夾鐘, A (la) = *guxi* 姑洗, A (la[#]) = *zhonglü* 中呂, B (si, also known as ti) = *ruibin* 蕤賓, C (do) = *linzhong* 林鐘, *huangzhong zhi* Gong 黃鐘之宮, C[#] (do[#]) = *yize* 夷則, D (re) = *nanlü* 南呂, D[#] (re[#]) = *wushe* 無射, E (mi) = *yingzhong* 應鐘.
5. Locations in residence are Door (*hu* 戶), Stove (*zao* 灶), Impluvium (*zhongliu* 中溜), Gate (*men* 門), and Walkway (*xing* 行).
6. The *Lüshi Chunqiu* lists the viscera that were to be used in sacrifices are Spleen (*pi* 脾), Lungs (*fei* 肺), Heart (*xin* 心), Liver (*gan* 肝), and Kidneys (*shen* 腎).

160 The five viscera mentioned in the *Lüshi Chunqiu* in this context refer to the parts of animals to be sacrificed, but could theoretically also be correlated to the human body as expressed in Han medical texts.

161 Strips 179–190.

7. The numbers associated with the pitches are obtained through arithmetical proportions, starting from the Yellow Bell (*huangzhong* 黃鐘): by multiplying its numerical value by $4/3$ one obtains the value of a fourth down, by multiplying by $2/3$ one gets to the fifth/quintile above. With an initial value of 81, not all results are integer numbers, so their values are rounded up or down to the nearest integer. The problem does not occur with 177147 as initial value for *fa*. For example, $177147 \times 2/3 = 118098$ gives the value for *do*, which is a fifth/quint up from *fa*; $118098 \times 4/3 = 157464$, the value for *sol*, which is a fourth down from *do*.

TABLE 2.5 Fangmatan correlations

Month by season	Stem	Spirits	Tone	Pitch standard		Expressed with large numbers	Location in residence	Viscera
C ¹ 1	S ₁ S ₂	DH GM	Shang	G (sol)	72	157464 ^a	Door	Spleen
C ² 2	S ₁ S ₂	DH GM		G# (sol#)	68	147456	Door	Spleen
C ³ 3	S ₁ S ₂	DH GM	Jue	A (la)	64	139968	Door	Spleen
X ¹ 4	S ₃ S ₄	YD ZR		A# (la#)	60	131072	Stove	Lungs
X ² 5	S ₃ S ₄	YD ZR		B (si) ^b	57	124416	Stove	Lungs
X ³ 6	S ₃ S ₄	YD ZR	Zhi	C (do)	54	118098	Stove	Lungs
o Center	S ₅ S ₆	HD HT			81	177147	Impluvium	Heart
Q ¹ 7	S ₇ S ₈	SH RS		C# (do#)	51	110592	Gate	Liver
Q ² 8	S ₇ S ₈	SH RS	Yu	D (re)	48	104976	Gate	Liver
Q ³ 9	S ₇ S ₈	SH RS		D# (re#)	45	98304	Gate	Liver
D ¹ 10	S ₉ S ₁₀	ZX XM		E (mi)	43	93312	Walkway	Kidneys
D ² 11	S ₉ S ₁₀	ZX XM	Gong	F (fa)	81	177147	Walkway	Kidneys
D ³ 12	S ₉ S ₁₀	ZX XM		F# (fa#)	76	165888	Walkway	Kidneys

a $157464 = 118098 \times 4/3$ (*sol* is a fourth down from *do*); $147456 = 110592 \times 4/3$ (*sol#* is a fourth down from *do#*); $139968 = 104976 \times 4/3$ (*la* is a fourth down from *re*); $131072 = 98304 \times 4/3$ (*la#* is a fourth down from *re#*); $124416 = 93312 \times 4/3$ (*si* is a fourth down from *mi*); $118098 = 177147 \times 2/3$ (*do* is a fifth/quint up from *fa*); $110592 = 177147 \times 2/3$ (*do* is a fifth/quint up from *fa*); $104976 = 157464 \times 2/3$ (*re* is a fifth/quint up from *sol*); $98304 = 147456 \times 2/3$ (*re#* is a fifth/quint up from *sol#*); $93312 = 139968 \times 2/3$ (*mi* is a fifth/quint up from *la*); $165888 = 124416 \times 4/3$ (*fa#* is a fourth down from *si*). The big numbers are found in the lower register of strips 194–205.

b “Si” is “ti” in the American system.

The Fangmatan lists correlations between 9 times of the day, mantic numbers (from 5 to 9), tones, and agents are as follows.¹⁶² The times are called Before Sunrise = *pingdan* 平旦, Sunrise = *richu* 日出, Breakfast = *zaoshi* 蚤食, Brunch = *moshi* 莫食, Noon = *rizhong* 日中, Afternoon = *xizhong* 西中, Supper = *hunshi* 昏市 (食), After Sunset = *mozhong* 莫中, Midnight = *xizhong* 夕中.¹⁶³

TABLE 2.6 Fangmatan correlations including times of day with tones

Before Sunrise	9	Zhi	Water
Sunrise	8	Gong	Water
Breakfast	7	Yu	Fire
Brunch	6	Jiao	Fire
Noon	5	Gong	Earth
Afternoon	9	Zhi	Earth
Supper	8	Shang	Metal
After Sunset	7	Yu	Metal
Midnight	6	Jiao	Water

Like many of the manuals composed of charts of correlated information, this one could be used to diagnose illness, predict the gender of an unborn child or clarify which part of the residence might be haunted. It could also suggest the best times for certain actions.

In some texts, the conjunction of a direction and a season indicates a travel warning. Do not travel East in the Spring, South in the Summer, and so forth.¹⁶⁴ Different parts of the seasons can also determine the safety of a trip or whether thieves can be caught.¹⁶⁵

As we noticed in the Shang oracle bone example above, concerns about omens in the weather and dreams are a constant in ancient Chinese divination. Whether predicting rainfall or interpreting dreams, a knowledge of calendrical astrology was essential. A rain calculation text based on the conjunctions of lunar months and the Stellar Lodges in the Beijing University

¹⁶² Strips 179–188.

¹⁶³ More time periods of the day, such as *dongzhong* 東中, *xizhong* 西中, *sushi* 夙市, *xishi* 夕市, *riru* 日入, *hunshi* 昏時 appear for example on strips 179–191 on the fourth register.

¹⁶⁴ Yan, *Jianbo shushu*, 67–82.

¹⁶⁵ See, for example, texts in Shuihudi, Jiudian, Wangjiatai, and Mawangdui (cf. *Huainan zi*), Chen, *Chudi chutu Zhanguo jiance*, 317–20, 321–30, and the Kanyu in the Beijing collection, Beijing daxue chutu wenxian yanjiusuo, *Beijing daxue cang Xi Han zhushu*, 5: 131–43.

collection helps to predict the size and type of precipitation whether there will be thunder, lightning, wind, snow, and so forth. It also predicts afflictions, food crises, travel and other problems.¹⁶⁶ The rain divination chart found in Yiwan was on the same board as the Spirit Turtle divination text used for capturing thieves discussed above. Somewhat like a turtle-body, the Rain manual is a cruciform with four steps between each endpoint. It does not have an accompanying manual. Like a version in the Fangmatan collection called *Sixty Jiazi* 六十甲子, it was a hemerological chart divided into symmetrical halves, suggesting a connection to calculating “split-up days” in the Root Mountain diagram.¹⁶⁷ Both the Yinwan and Fangmatan versions begin with Jiazi (Day 1) at the top of the column just right of the central vertical line (this line is drawn on the Yinwan version only).

TABLE 2.7 Yiwan rain diagram translated to day numbers

				11	1				
			53	12	2	21			
		45	54	13	3	22	31		
	37	46	55	14	4	23	32	41	
29	38	47	56	15	5	24	33	42	51
30	39	48	57	16	6	25	34	43	52
	40	49	58	17	7	26	35	44	
		50	59	18	8	27	36		
			60	19	9	28			
				20	10				

There are five columns on either side. Both versions have a horizontal line, which divides the numerical series of day names into horizontal sets of five, four, three, and two days. In the Yiwan example (see Table 2.7), we see that days 1–10 begin in the center right column and that the counting by vertical sets of days alternates first to the left column of 10 days (11–20) and then switches back to the right side for the counting set of 8 (21–28), then to the far left for 2 days (29–30), right to a set of 6 (31–36), left for a set of 4 (37–40) then right for a set of 4 (41–44), left for a set 6 (45–50), right for a set of 2 (51–52), and finally

166 Chen, “Beida Han jian zhong de Yu shu”; Beijing daxue chutu wenxian yanjiusuo, *Beijing daxue cang Xi Han zhushu*, 5: 77–86.

167 Huang, “*Rishu*” *tuxiang yanjiu*, 144–9; Fodde-Reguer, “Divining Bureaucracy,” 70; Kalinowski, “Hemerology and Prediction,” 187–9.

TABLE 2.8 Yiwan rain diagram translated to Stem and Branch numbers

				S1B11	S1B1				
			S3B5	S2B12	S2B2	S1B9			
		S5B9	S4B6	S3B1	S3B3	S2B10	S1B7		
	S7B1	S6B10	S5B7	S4B2	S4B4	S3B11	S2B8	S1B5	
S9B5	S8B2	S7B11	S6B8	S5B3	S5B5	S4B12	S3B9	S2B6	S1B3
S10B6	S9B3	S8B12	S7B9	S6B4	S6B6	S5B1	S4B19	S3B7	S2B4
	S10B4	S9B1	S8B10	S7B5	S7B7	S6B2	S5B11	S4B8	
		S10B2	S9B11	S8B6	S8B8	S7B3	S6B12		
			S10B12	S9B7	S9B9	S8B4			
				S10B8	S10B10				

left for a set of 8 (53–60). Instead of continuing the count into the last column of 2 days on the right, it switches back to the left side. There seems to be a concern that the right side vertical columns begin with Jia (Si) days and that all columns begin with odd-numbered Stems and Branches, possibly emphasizing a Yang or Heavenly direction. Coincidentally, each column ends with an even numbered day and Branch, possibly emphasizing a Yin or Earthly direction. The Fangmatan manual on Divining Weather (*zhanhou* 占候) like the Beijing University text combines Stellar Lodge and temporal conjunctions as well as travel and affliction warnings.¹⁶⁸

Dream interpretation, evident already in the Shang oracle bones, appears again in a set of bamboo texts dating to the Qin period rescued by the Yuelu Academy 嶽麓學院 from Hong Kong antique dealers. Whereas the Shang king interpreted dreams politically, in this text dream images were analyzed to diagnose medical afflictions and other issues of daily life or fortune (travel, life and death, career, etc.).¹⁶⁹ The *Zhanmeng shu* 占夢書 (Book for prognosticating dreams) preserved at Yuelu Academy specifically states that the interpretation of dreams must accord to the seasons. Dreams have been a subject of divination since the Shang period and continue to be a source of concern expressed in the daybooks. Of particular concern were signs of visitations by ghosts or other ill-intentioned spirits that could afflict the person mentally or physically.

168 Huang, “*Rishu*” *tuxiang yanjiu*, 147.

169 Lianyingang shi bowuguan, Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan jianbo yanjiu zhongxin, Donghaixian bowuguan, Zhongguo wenwu yanjiusuo, *Yiwan Han mu jianshu*, 123–6; For an introduction and discussion in English to the Yinwan and Yuelu divination texts, see Fodde-Reguer, “Divining Bureaucracy,” chapters 2 and 3.

In the Yuelu text, the diviner interpreted the images of the dream according to the time, season and, in some cases, Stem days, to determine the fate of the client.¹⁷⁰ The calculation of factors of time and image to determine fate, often involving sacrifices to certain spirits, recalls the *Jingjue* stalk divination text. Some of the names of the spirits causing the afflictions in both texts are similar.¹⁷¹ Both the *Zhanmeng shu* and *Jingjue* are texts stolen from tombs, but not only stored in different places but are also presumably a century apart in time. Nevertheless, the shared content and divinatory factors interpreted by the writers and users of these two divination texts suggest some sort of cultural connection.

4 Conclusion

Texts preserved underground until modern times provide a glimpse of the rich and complex texture of ancient Chinese prognostication methods and ideology. No doubt there is much more that has not been preserved, so we must keep in mind that this chapter provides only samples of the whole and explores just a few of the many issues that remain to be researched. In summary, we see some radical changes and some constants in the two millennia of time covered.

First, the material nature of the texts, their archaeology context, and socio-political forces behind their production and use have changed. Oracle bones, once they lost their power were cast into pits, possibly in proximity to or inside ancestral shrines, and the bamboo, silk, and wooden texts were preserved in tombs. Any texts preserved above ground, in shrines or royal libraries no longer exist in material form. Their contents are either lost forever or absorbed into the transmitted tradition and thus naturally suffer repeated editing and censorship. Turtle bone divination was a craft limited to those with wealth and power. A bureaucracy was required to supervise the import of these exotic bones, their proper preparation before cracking, the host of diviners in charge of cracking and interpretation, and then their storage. This structure is most obvious for the late Shang period. Aspects of it were no doubt retained up through the end of the Western Zhou in the eighth-century BCE, although access to turtle bones, especially to those from the southeastern coast, must have been limited. After

170 Lu, "Yuelu Qin jian *Zhan meng shu*"; Fodde-Reguer, "Divining Bureaucracy," 43, 54–7, 123–7; Pang, "Yuelu shu yuan cang Qin jian (I), *Zhan meng shu yanjiu*," 2–7, 21–32, 187–99.

171 Cf. Fodde-Reguer, "Divining Bureaucracy," 58–60; Pang, "Yuelu shu yuan cang Qin jian (I), *Zhan meng shu yanjiu*," 177–86.

the fall of the Zhou court, local courts tried to maintain Zhou ritual customs but over the centuries regional priorities forced change and the supply chain of turtles, or type of turtle used, probably became less secure. This may have been one factor behind the shift in emphasis to cleromantic and hemerological techniques and ultimately to cosmograph *shi*-style diagrams. Another factor was also political change and the desire to incorporate new technical knowledge.

From the fourth century BCE on, we see the use of multiple types of divination in rotation by local elites (and not just kings) with access to diviner teams. Different methods, including but not exclusively bone and stalk, were used to verify results, which were in turn interpreted according to a variety of external factors, such as season, day signs, “images” in the environment, and, by early imperial times, astral configurations and a host of other factors. Diviners consulted charts and diagrams drawn out on bamboo strips woven together, sheets of silk, and wooden planks.

Who were the diviners? It seems from early on they were an official class subject to kings and needs of the court. With the dispersal of the Zhou ritual experts after the eighth century BCE, it is likely experts in divination, like many ritual experts and the early philosophers, became an itinerant class dependent on handouts from the local state courts which rose and fell in power up until the consolidation of political power by the Qin in 221 BCE. Some long-lived and powerful states, such as Chu, Qin, and Qi occupying the corners of the ancient Chinese world, could maintain lineages of local experts. Even so the transfer of knowledge from one region to another was fluid and vast. This is obvious from the variety of texts preserved by chance in the anaerobic environments of ancient Chu tombs. Labeled a barbarian backwater in traditional histories, archeology tells us a radically different story. It was a rich, powerful, and complex culture.¹⁷² The early Han government was deeply influenced by Qin legal structures but the dominant culture reflected Chu influence. With the rise of local elite and strong regional kingdoms, it is likely that lineages of diviners thrived but also a range of local and itinerant professionals.

The texts from ancient tombs make it clear that literacy spread dramatically after the fifth century BCE. It was no longer limited to certain officials.¹⁷³ The variety of methods and their required knowledge may have limited the manipulation and interpretation of these often very cryptic texts to professionals, but this professional class may not have had a controlled standard of education or methodological allegiance. Research remains to be done on what the

172 Cook and Major, *Defining Chu*.

173 Cook, “Education and the Way.”

qualifications were for an ancient diviner. Since he (or less likely, she) had to negotiate with powerful and scary spirits, how did they display to their clients the competence to do so? Mathematical skills and astronomical knowledge may have been key in some quarters, a self-cultivated and refined “jade body” of the sage in others.¹⁷⁴

One aspect of the ancient divination process that remained over time was the types of concerns addressed. Kings are worried about their political and military success and everyone is concerned about success in their careers, marriages, and in their personal health. Over time the pantheon of spirits appealed to varied but human concerns remained constant.

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174 The “jade body” was the refined state achieved by inner cultivation of cosmic forces, see Csikszentmihalyi, *Material Virtue*.

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Prognostication in Premodern China

Issues of Culture and Class

Richard J. Smith

1 Introduction¹

From neolithic times into the twentieth century, divination played an extraordinarily important role in Chinese culture,² expressed in ritual, enshrined in myth, entrenched in social and political institutions, and closely related to such seemingly diverse areas of life as science, technology, military affairs, music and medicine.³ One indication of the importance of divination in premodern China as a category of cultural concern is the attention given to the mantic arts in the traditional Chinese dynastic histories and in reference works of all kinds from the Han dynasty onward.⁴ A striking example from late imperial times is the massive Qing dynasty encyclopedia known as the *Qinding gujin tushu jicheng* 欽定古今圖書集成 (Imperially approved complete collection of writings and illustrations, past and present; 1726; hereafter *Tushu jicheng*), which devotes well over two thousand pages to fortune-tellers and mantic techniques.⁵ Another index is Yuan Shushan's 袁樹珊 monumental *Zhongguo*

1 A preliminary note on sources: Since this handbook is written in English for an Anglophone audience, I have emphasized English-language books and articles in most of my citations. In the interest of specialists, however, I have cited some important Chinese works in the notes and inserted Chinese characters for most personal names, terms and titles in the text. For a more complete inventory, see the several glossaries at <https://history.rice.edu/Yijing> (accessed February 20, 2020).

2 For a useful overview in Chinese, see Rong, “Zhanbu de yuanliu.” =

3 For a sophisticated theoretical discussion of divination, see Kory, “Cracking to Divine,” 12–31.

4 See, for example, Raphals, “Divination in the *Han shu*.” See also the discussions of encyclopedias in Smith, *The Qing Dynasty and Traditional Chinese Culture*, esp. 39–42, 121–2, 215–18, 308–12, 317, 326, 342, 345, 348, 363, 367, 369, 372, 373, 384.

5 For a wealth of material on diviners and divining practices from the Zhou to the Ming, see TSJC, *yishu* 藝術, 47:5681–7854. The TSJC contains excerpts from a great many books on divination, as well as comments on divining practices recorded in a wide variety of classical, literary, historical and other sources. It also includes 348 biographical entries for diviners, organized under five major (and overlapping) categories: Oracle Bones and Milfoil Stalks (*bushi* 卜筮; 112 individuals), Astrology (*xingming* 星命; 24), Physiognomy (*xiangshu* 相術; 46), Geomancy (*kanyu* 堪輿; 115) and Computational Arts (*shushu* 數術; 51). Of these

lidai buren zhuan 中國歷代卜人傳 (Biographies of diviners in China by period; 1948), which consists largely of excerpts from local Chinese gazetteers, official histories, and other such sources.⁶ Of the more than 3,000 biographical entries in Yuan's book, about a third are from the Qing period (1636–1912).

Yuan, born in 1881 and himself a fortune-teller of some renown, was a rare specimen: a Chinese scholar who gave serious and systematic attention to divination as a social phenomenon, and who chronicled out of his own personal interest both the techniques and the lives of its major exponents in China's past.⁷ Although a great number of other Chinese intellectuals wrote about prognostication, sometimes critically or equivocally (except in the case of their own use of the *Yijing* or *Classic of Changes*), most Chinese in traditional times simply took certain forms of prediction for granted – especially indications of auspicious and inauspicious activities for specified days. As with weather forecasting in contemporary life, people generally divined, acted on the advice of seers and consulted almanacs and calendars without bothering to acknowledge the fact in their public discourse.

Western sojourners, on the other hand – from the Jesuits in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to diplomats, Protestant missionaries and free-lance foreign employees of the Qing government in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – constantly commented on the prevalence of divination in China. The remarks of S.W. Williams, a long-time resident in the nineteenth century, are typical in tone and substance: “No people are more

individuals, the majority are from the Six Dynasties (45), Tang (55), Song (82), and Ming (108). Computational Arts seems to be a catch-all category, containing biographies that reflect not only calendrical and astrological skills, but also the practice of geomancy and divination by means of the *Yijing*, dreams, and even sounds and smells. See also Marc Kalinowski's contribution in this volume.

- 6 Yuan's BRZ, organized by provinces and provincial subdivisions, identifies 778 diviners by both name and specialization (twenty or so different techniques), and provides information on a total of well over three thousand practitioners. Of the smaller sample, over 400 are pre-Qing – most of them, following the general pattern of the TSJC, from the Six Dynasties (68), Tang (58), Song (100) and Ming (164) dynasties. It may be added that these two sources overlap somewhat, and neither is by any means exhaustive. Although Yuan's bibliography includes several hundred local gazetteers, a spot check of the sections on *fangji* 方技 (technicians) in forty or so gazetteers from various parts of China reveals a number of significant omissions. Similarly, the TSJC does not include biographical entries for all diviners mentioned in the *fangji* sections of the dynastic histories. Furthermore, by personal inclination as well as by the nature of their primary sources, both Yuan and the editors of the TSJC ignore certain “unorthodox” types of divination, such as spirit writing (*fujī* 扶箕), and tend to emphasize individuals who exemplify conventional Confucian virtues.
- 7 My book, *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers* is based largely on Yuan's BRZ. For information on Yuan, see Li and Lackner, “Divination and Western Knowledge.”

enslaved by fear of the unknown than the Chinese, and none resort more frequently to sortilege to ascertain whether an enterprise will be successful or a proposed remedy avail to a cure. This desire actuates all classes, and thousands and myriads of persons take advantage of it to their own profit." Similarly, Henrietta Shuck asserted that "There is probably no country in the present age of the world, in which divination is carried on to so great an extent as in China." William Milne observed in 1820 that "Astrology, divination, geomancy and necromancy every where prevail [in China]"; and several decades later, A.P. Parker stated that fortune-telling in China was "universally believed in." At the end of the century, Arthur Smith remarked that "the number of Chinese who make a living out of ... [divination] is past all estimation."⁸

But how accurate were such observations? Many Westerners, after all, had a deep-seated hostility to practices such as geomancy, which they viewed as an impediment to modern "progress." Could they possibly evaluate Chinese divination objectively? Missionaries, as attuned to "superstition" as to sin, might well have exaggerated the situation in China to justify their own "civilizing" enterprise. Yet where evidence exists from the Chinese side, whether in the form of official documents, letters, anecdotes, proverbs, popular fiction, or scholarly indictments of fortune-telling, it almost invariably confirms the accuracy of Western accounts. Taken together, Chinese and Western sources indicate that divination was an extraordinarily significant social phenomenon in Qing times and undoubtedly well before.

What, then, does divination tell us about traditional Chinese culture – its language, its logic, its cosmology, and its values? My main focus in this essay is on the relationship between cultural unity and cultural diversity in imperial China; that is, the degree of "fit" between the perceptions, values, attitudes and activities of different levels and sectors of Chinese society. Divination provides us with a valuable means of measurement, I think. Although its particular manifestations and social significance may have varied from time to time, place to place, and group to group, divination touched every sector of Chinese society, from emperor to peasant. Virtually everyone in China believed that certain cosmological factors affected human destiny, and all used a similar symbolic vocabulary to express these cosmic variables. Although the notion of "fate" may have been differently conceived,⁹ and despite the fact that certain cosmological symbols could be interpreted in different ways, there nonetheless existed a shared "grammar" in the discourse of divination, a common

8 These and other Western opinions about divination are cited in Smith, *Mapping China and Managing the World*, 137–38.

9 See Raphals, "Debates about Fate in Early China."

ground of cultural understanding. In other words, fortune-telling, like religion and culture itself, was capable of generating an infinite number of statements, but it was nonetheless constrained by its own internal “logic.”

To be sure, class divisions and regional differences have long posed formidable obstacles to cultural integration in China, even after the “unification” of the empire by the Qin dynasty in 221 BCE. Proverbially in China, “Customs differ every ten *li* [several miles]” (*shi li bu tong feng* 十里不同風), and throughout Chinese history class distinctions have been carefully preserved in both the theory and the practice of ritual and law. Since the 1950s, scholars have paid particular attention to questions of social class in China – not only because of the obvious ideological orientation of Marxism, but also because of the robust and contagious theorizing of anthropologists such as Robert Redfield and his colleagues at the University of Chicago – individuals who had a particular interest in the distinction they saw in so-called agrarian societies between the “great tradition” of literate urban elites and the “little tradition” of essentially non-literate peasants.¹⁰

During the 1950s and early ‘60s, much of the China scholarship on this question focused on “religion.” The prevailing view was expressed in the following terms by the eminent scholar Wing-tsit Chan:

I have always urged that instead of dividing the religious life of the Chinese people into three compartments called Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, it is far more accurate to divide it into two levels, the level of the masses and the level of the enlightened.... The masses worship thousands of idols and natural objects of ancient, Buddhist, Taoist, and other origins, making special offerings to whatever deity is believed to have the power to influence their lives at the time. The enlightened, on the other hand, honor only Heaven, ancestors, and sometimes Confucius, Buddha, Lao Tzu, and a few great historical beings, but not other spirits.¹¹

Chan went on to contrast the religious practices and motivations of commoners and elites, juxtaposing the self-interested *bai* 拜 (worship) of the masses with the honorific *ji* 祭 (sacrificial offerings) of the “enlightened” few.

10 See Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture*. For two able discussions of the evolution of the concept of “popular” culture in the light of Redfield’s theories, see Bell, “Religion and Chinese Culture,” and Clart, “Research on Religions in China.”

11 Chan, *Religious Trends in Modern China*, 141–42.

A number of other China scholars have argued for a similar distinction between elite and “popular” beliefs, although not with an emphasis on enlightenment and ignorance. For instance, in a highly influential study Arthur Wolf wrote in 1974 that “there has always been a vast gulf between the religion of the [Chinese] elite and that of the peasantry,” and David Johnson has gone so far as to say that from the standpoint of both class and region, “any unities among Chinese religious practices would be so abstract as to be meaningless.”¹²

Several scholars, however, have asserted that the “gulf” separating elites from commoners was not as great as Wolf and others have maintained. Marjorie Topley, for one, has emphasized the way that “the scholar’s tradition acted on that of the ordinary man ... [and] the latter’s tradition reflected back on him.”¹³ In the same spirit, Maurice Freedman has criticized those who distinguish too sharply between elite “rationality” and peasant “superstition.” Indeed, Freedman maintains that there were certain important similarities in the religious practices of elites and commoners. In his words, “all religious argument and ritual differentiation [in China] were conducted within a common language of basic conceptions, symbols, and ritual forms.”¹⁴

In an effort to reconcile these two seemingly antithetical views, James Watson has argued that Chinese religion allowed for “a high degree of variation within an overall structure of unity.” According to Watson,

The Chinese cultural system ... allowed for what outsiders might perceive to be chaotic local diversity. The domain of ritual, in particular, gave great scope to regional and subethnic cultural displays. The system was so flexible that those who called themselves Chinese could have their cake and eat it too: They could participate in a unified culture yet at the same time celebrate their local or regional distinctiveness.¹⁵

But the question of whether these ritual displays have ever reflected the high degree of cultural unity that Watson claims remains an open one, subject to intense and persistent debate.¹⁶

12 Cited in Smith, *The Qing Dynasty and Traditional Chinese Culture*, 10–11.

13 Topley, *Cantonese Society in Hong Kong and Singapore*, chap. 13, esp. 277.

14 See Freedman, “On the Sociological Study of Chinese Religion,” 37ff.

15 Cited in Smith, *The Qing Dynasty and Traditional Chinese Culture*, 239–40.

16 See the criticisms of Watson’s approach in Sutton, “Ritual, Cultural Standardization, and Orthopraxy in China.”

Similar, but not identical, issues arise when we shift our focus from “religion” to divination. On the one hand, we have the opinion of Wing-tsit Chan:

The masses believe in astrology, almanacs, dream interpretation, geomancy, witchcraft, phrenology, palmistry, the recalling of the soul, fortune-telling in all forms, charms, magic, and all varieties of superstitions. The enlightened are seldom contaminated by these diseases.¹⁷

In the same spirit, Western scholars such as John Henderson have emphasized that for some two thousand years, Chinese scholars have often condemned popular divinatory beliefs.¹⁸

On the other hand, as I have long maintained, and will argue below as well, there is growing evidence to suggest that from the Warring States period (481–221 BCE) onward, Chinese scholarly elites have availed of virtually all the “popular” mantic techniques enumerated by Chan above.¹⁹ Moreover, although there have always been criticisms of mantic practices by Chinese elites, they have almost invariably been directed toward one or another technique (or type of practitioner), not against the idea of divination itself. A partial exception might be the philosopher Xunzi 荀子 (c.310–238 BCE), who steadfastly rejected the idea that anyone can understand the future through divination. But even he saw value in the practice, as a way of helping humans to understand their role in the cosmos – specifically, the goal of “forming a triad with Heaven and Earth” (*ren can tiandi* 人參天地).²⁰ What bothered scholarly elites most was the professionalization of divination – self-interested prediction for profit.

¹⁷ Chan, *Religious Trends in Modern China*, 141–42.

¹⁸ Henderson, *The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology*; and Henderson, “Cosmology and Concepts of Nature in Traditional China.”

¹⁹ I have documented this point at length in Smith, *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers*. During the past several decades, a great deal of research has been done in Mainland China on divination, which, prior to the 1980s was a taboo topic. See Smith, “Divination in Late Imperial China.” For just a few of a great many Western-language studies of divination based on archaeological discoveries in China, see Harper, “Warring States Natural Philosophy and Occult Thought”; Kalinowski, “Technical Traditions in Ancient China”; Kalinowski, “Diviners and Astrologers under the Eastern Zhou”; Kalinowski, “Divination and Astrology”; Fodde-Reguer, “Divining Bureaucracy”; Raphals, *Divination and Prediction in Early China and Ancient Greece*; and Harper and Kalinowski, *Books of Fate and Popular Culture*. For a few relevant Chinese-language works, see Hu, *Zhongguo zaoqi fangshu yu wenxian congkao*; Li, *Zhongguo fangshu zhengkao*; Li, *Zhongguo fangshu xukao*; Song, *Zhongguo shushu wenhua shi*; Zhang, *Fangshu yu Zhongguo chuantong wenhua*. See also Constance Cook’s contribution in this volume.

²⁰ See the discussion in Puett, *To Become a God*, 182–88.

2 Cosmology and Divination in Traditional China: A Brief Overview

Divination in China is as old as Chinese culture itself. By the third millennium, BCE at the latest, specialists in reading stress cracks in the bones of deer, sheep, pigs, and cattle had already emerged as a distinct occupational group in north China's neolithic cultures. During the Shang dynasty (c.1600–c.1050 BCE), the use of these so-called oracle bones reached a high degree of sophistication, since this form of divination became the principal means by which the Shang kings were able to establish communication, through the medium of their ancestors, with their supreme deity, Shangdi 上帝 (“Lord on High”). It was thus a royal prerogative. By applying intense heat to the dried plastrons of turtles and to the scapulae of cattle and other animals – a technique known as pyroplastronomy or more simply pyromancy – the Shang kings and their diviners were able to produce cracks in the bone, which yielded answers to questions both trivial and weighty. Such “questions,” which modern Chinese scholars describe as “charges” (*mingci* 命辭), were normally phrased as declarations, which might express a prediction, a hope, a fear, or a prayer of a sort.²¹

Early Shang oracle bone divination bore on a wide range of topics, from the stars, weather, agriculture, hunting, construction, warfare and travel, to administrative problems and sacrifices, personal health, child-bearing, and, importantly, dreams.²² In the words of David Keightley, pyromancy expressed “the very ethos and world view of the Shang elite,” albeit incompletely.²³ It also left a significant legacy to subsequent dynasties, in addition to an obvious emphasis on divination and ancestor veneration. For instance, the Shang dynasty's use of sexagenary cyclical characters (“stems,” *gan* 干 and “branches,” *zhi* 支) to mark time continued in all subsequent dynasties, and can still be seen today in traditional Chinese almanacs and divination manuals of all sorts.²⁴ Moreover, there is growing evidence to support the view that the Shang Chinese developed a numerical system capable of producing the trigrams (*gua* 卦) and hexagrams (also *gua* 卦) that became the foundation of the legendary *Yijing* 易經 or

21 Many Western scholars have come to similar conclusions. For a convenient summary, see Edward L. Shaughnessy's long and detailed review of Lisa Raphals' *Divination and Prediction in Early China and Ancient Greece* in the *Journal of Chinese Studies*.

22 Shang oracle bone inscriptions indicate an interest in dream interpretation that persisted throughout Chinese history. See, for example, Drège, “Notes d'oniologie chinoise”; and Ong, *The Interpretation of Dreams in Ancient China*. In Chinese, consult Chen et al., *Zhonghua zhanmeng shu*.

23 Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 155.

24 See J. Smith, “The ‘Di Zhi’ 地支 as Lunar Phases.”

Classic of Changes) – arguably the single most important work in China’s entire imperial history.²⁵

By the late Shang period, in contrast to earlier in the dynasty, oracle bone divinations focused narrowly on a fixed sacrificial schedule and ritualized affairs such as the hunt (*tian* 田; lit. “[taking] the field”), and whereas the earliest prognostications (*zhanci* 占辭) were often elaborate and could be either auspicious or inauspicious, by the end of the Shang period such prognostications tended to be brief, formalized, and almost invariably auspicious. Similarly, verifications (*yanci* 驗辭) – that is, records of what actually happened after a prognostication had been made – were often detailed in the early Shang and far more terse by the end of the dynasty. This and other evidence suggests that in the twilight of Shang rule, pyromancy lost much of its mystique, and became more accessible to non-royalty. Meanwhile, other forms of divination, including the use of milfoil stalks to divine, seem to have gained in popularity (see below).²⁶

Shang theocratic rule surrendered to a more “secular” feudalism in the Zhou dynasty (c.1050–256 BCE). As is well known, the Zhou kings justified their conquest of the Shang by reference to the so-called Mandate of Heaven (*tianming* 天命). This explicitly moral concept gave Heaven responsibility for determining if earthly government was benevolent and just. If so, there would be harmony in nature and peace on earth; if not, then Heaven’s displeasure would be expressed through anomalies and natural disasters. Rebellions would arise, and the existing government’s mandate would be withdrawn. Oppressed people, it came to be believed, had the right to rebel, and heavenly signs pointed the way. For this reason, the Zhou state, and all subsequent Chinese regimes, made every effort to divine Heaven’s will, to predict the movements of the sun, moon, stars and planets, and to interpret portents correctly. Chinese astrology, astronomy, divination and calendrical science increasingly coalesced into a single administratively-grounded science.²⁷

Classical sources from the Zhou period, such as the *Odes* (*Shi* 詩; later *Shijing* 詩經 or *Classic of Poetry*), the *Documents* (*Shu* 書 or *Shangshu* 尚書;

25 See Zhang and Liu, “Some Observations about Milfoil Divination.” On the cultural significance of the *Changes*, see Smith, *Fathoming the Cosmos and Ordering the World*; and *The I Ching*.

26 It should be noted, however, that according to recent research, the use of oracle bones remained “a living tradition and an active form of mantic and religious culture” for nearly a thousand years into the imperial era. See Kory, “Cracking to Divine,” esp. 421ff.

27 See Sivin, “State, Cosmos, and Body”; see also Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China*, and Wang, *Yinyang*.

later *Shujing* 書經 or *Classic of history*), the *Zhou Changes* (*Zhouyi* 周易; later to become the *Yijing*), the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), the *Record of Ritual* (*Liji* 禮記), the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (Commentary of Zuo), and the *Zhouli* 周禮 (Rites of Zhou), together with recently excavated inscribed oracle bones, bronzes and writings on both silk and bamboo, attest to the importance of divination in China throughout the Zhou period.²⁸ During the early Zhou, as had been the case during most of the Shang dynasty, divination remained primarily a royal prerogative. By the Spring and Autumn era (c.722–481 BCE), however, and especially during the chaotic Warring States period (c.481–221 BCE) that followed, the mantic arts became more diversified and widespread, practiced now by private individuals as well as the court, and by women as well as men.²⁹

Although pyromancy remained a prominent form of divination during the Zhou period and thereafter, the use of milfoil stalks (*shi* 蓍) for mantic purposes proved to be far more convenient. The most common use of the milfoil during the late Zhou period, and indeed throughout the entire imperial era (221 BCE to 1912 CE), was in conjunction with the *Zhou Changes*.³⁰ The basic text (*benwen* 本文) of the “received” version of this document,³¹ dating from around 800 BCE, perhaps earlier, consists of sixty-four hexagrams (*gua* 卦), each with a name designed to indicate its basic symbolic significance. Most hexagram names (*guaming* 卦名) refer to a thing, an activity, a state, a situation, a quality, an emotion, or a relationship – for example, “Well,” “Marrying Maiden,” “Treading,” “Peace,” “Obstruction,” “Waiting,” “Contention,” and “Contentment.” Each hexagram is composed of six solid (yang, —) or broken (yin, —) lines in various combinations. Every hexagram also has a “judgment” (*tuan* 彖; a.k.a. “hexagram statement,” *guaci* 卦辭; sometimes known in English as a “decision,” or a “tag”), and a cryptic “appended statement”

28 In the *Zuozhuan* alone there more than 130 accounts of divination: 46 pertaining to oracle bones 26 pertaining to dreams, 19 pertaining to astrology and the calendar, 18 pertaining to milfoil stalks and 15 pertaining to omens. For relevant citations, see the sources cited in note 19 above and note 50 below.

29 See Kalinowski, “Diviners and Astrologers under the Eastern Zhou,” 341–96. For gender issues, see Raphals, *Divination and Prediction in Early China and Ancient Greece* – in particular the section on “Gender and Mantic Access” – and Jia, “Gender and Early Chinese Cosmology Revisited.”

30 See Smith, *Fathoming the Cosmos*; and *The I Ching*, for details on the theoretical foundations and historical evolution of the *Changes* in China.

31 On the various other versions of the *Changes* discovered during the past few decades, see Edward Shaughnessy’s *Unearthing the Changes*. See also Xing, “Hexagram Pictures and Early Yi Schools”; and Cook and Zhao, *Stalk Divination*.

(*xici* 繫辭 or *yaoci* 爻辭) for each line. The judgments are short explanations of the overall symbolic situation represented by a given hexagram.³²

According to the theory of the *Changes* as it developed during the late Zhou period, the sixty-four hexagrams represented all of the fundamental situations one might encounter at any given moment in one's life. It followed, then, that by selecting a particular hexagram or hexagrams at a given moment, and by correctly interpreting the symbolic elements involved (especially, but not exclusively, the judgments, line statements and trigrams), a person could devise a strategy for dealing with issues pertaining to the present and the future. Everything depended on the correct interpretation of these symbolic elements, generally described as "images" (*xiang* 象; also translated as figures, symbols, models, configurations, counterparts, simulacra, etc.), which represented and expressed the cosmic powers and changing circumstances of the entire universe.³³

The problem with the basic text of the *Changes* is that it began as "an assorted and jumbled compilation of omens, rhymed proverbs, riddles and paradoxes, snatches of song and story, drawn from popular lore and archaic traditions of divination,"³⁴ and therefore almost nothing about it was unambiguously clear. Written commentaries were thus necessary to make practical, moral and/or metaphysical sense out of it. The most important of these, at least in the early history of the work, were known collectively as the *Shiyi* 十翼 (Ten wings). These diverse commentaries, written by different people at different times during the Warring States period, became officially attached to the basic text of the *Changes* when the work received imperial sanction in 136 BCE as a major "Confucian" classic – that is, a work closely associated with the moral teachings of Confucius and his followers.³⁵

Parallel to the growing popularity of the *Zhouyi* as a device for knowing the future in the late Zhou era was a burst of interest in other divination

32 See Smith, *Fathoming the Cosmos* and *The I Ching* for details on the evolving symbolism of the *Changes*.

33 For a discussion of the concept of images, see Smith, *Fathoming the Cosmos*, 38–40 and 274, notes 36–41; Kory, "Cracking to Divine," 24–31; Gu, "Elucidation of Images in the *Book of Changes*."

34 Nylan and Sivin, "The First Neo-Confucianism," 43. Cf. Xing, "Did King Wen of Zhou Develop the *Zhouyi*?"

35 As many Asian and Western authorities have pointed out, there is no classical Chinese term that fits the Western term "Confucianism." The closest Chinese expressions are *Rujiao* 儒教 (the teaching of the classical scholars [Ru] 儒) or *Ruxue* 儒學 (the learning of the classical scholars), which often referred to ritual specialists. For this reason, some Western scholars prefer the terms Ru or Ruist. But if we grant that the teachings/learning of the Ru admitted as much variety as, say, "Christianity" or "socialism," I think we can comfortably use Confucians and Confucianism, especially from the Song period onward.

systems – astrology, dream interpretation, geomancy, physiognomy, predictions based on weather, calendrical calculations and various computational arts (*shushu* 術數).³⁶ One obviously important factor contributing to the popularity of divination during the Warring States period was the chaos and uncertainty of the times. People of all social classes wanted to know how to cope more effectively with present and future circumstances, and fortune-tellers were able to provide some measure of guidance and assurance.³⁷ One popular means for doing so was the almanac or “day book” (*rishu* 日書), which specified propitious and unpropitious times for a wide range of activities, from marriage and milfoil divination, to bathing, washing one’s hair, or beginning a construction project.³⁸

Aside from the well-known contributions of philosophers such as Confucius, Laozi (sixth century?), Mozi (c.470–c.391), Mencius (c.372–c.289), Zhuangzi (c.389–286 BCE), and Xunzi to ethical and epistemological discourse in China, the single most important intellectual development of the Warring States period was the growing influence of correlative cosmology – championed, according to tradition, by the “naturalist” philosopher Zou Yan 鄒衍 (c.305–240 BCE) and further developed by several other Chinese thinkers, including those represented in a composite work attributed to Lü Buwei 呂不韋 (291–235 BCE) titled *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (The spring and autumn annals of Mr Lü). At the heart of this emerging cosmology lay the concepts of *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽, the *wuxing* 五行 (variously translated as five agents, five activities, five phases, five elements, five qualities, etc.), and *qi* 氣 (variously translated as life breath, ether, energy, pneuma, vital essence, material force, primordial substance, psychophysical stuff, etc.). The origins and evolution of these concepts, which I shall generally leave untranslated, have been much discussed by Asian and Western scholars – particularly in the light of new archaeological discoveries in China during the past several decades.³⁹

These three cosmological concepts became virtually indispensable in late Zhou, Qin and Han discourses of all sorts – from philosophy, religion,

36 There are a wide variety of technical terms and translations for these and other forms of divination. See, for example, Kalinowski, “Technical Traditions,” 223–48; Kalinowski, “Mantic Texts”; and Kalinowski, “Divination and Astrology.” In Chinese, see Li, *Zhongguo fangshu zhengkao*, and “Zhanguo Qin Han fangshi liupai kao.”

37 From a philosophical standpoint, a number of Chinese thinkers attributed the rise of “techniques” (*shu* 術) in the Warring States period to the “decline of the Dao.” See Csikszentmihalyi, “Chia I’s ‘Techniques of the Tao,’” 118ff.

38 See Kalinowski, “Les livres des jours (*rishu*).” See also Harper and Kalinowski, *Books of Fate and Popular Culture*.

39 For an overview, see Nylan, “Yin-yang, Five Phases, and Qi,” 398–408. See also the works cited in note 19 above and note 47 below. On echoes of the “Great Commentary” in the *Lüshi chunqiu*, see Cook, “*Lüshi chunqiu* and the Resolution of Philosophical Dissonance.”

psychology, divination, food and medicine to art, music, ritual, law and military affairs.⁴⁰ They were also shared by different social classes and manifest in different regions of China. To be sure, certain scholars and practitioners might have somewhat different conceptions of exactly how *yin* and *yang* and the *wuxing* operated, or how *qi* was generated and how it was constituted. Moreover, there were discussions of *yin* and *yang* that did not include the *wuxing* and discussions of the *wuxing* that did not involve *yin* and *yang*. But over time, substantial agreement emerged regarding the cosmological and ontological status of these three concepts, which came to be viewed in terms of interactions based on “influence and response” (*ganying* 感應), resonances that might exist any kind of relationship, from the mundane to the cosmic.⁴¹

So it was that on the eve of the imperial era, *yin* and *yang*, *wuxing* and *qi* – like various spirits, heavenly bodies, earthly forms, stems and branches, and the trigrams and hexagrams of the *Changes* – were viewed as cosmic forces that were (or could be) dynamically related and interactive. Different individuals might emphasize different cosmic variables in their calculations, but all the variables were at least theoretically in play.

3 The Han Divination and Cosmology

Correlative cosmology reached a high point in the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). By this time there seems to have been widespread agreement on the basic functions of *yin* and *yang*, *wuxing*, and *qi*. At the risk of oversimplification, *yin* and *yang* came to be viewed in three distinct but related ways: (1) as cosmic forces that produced and animated all natural phenomena; (2) as terms used to identify recurrent, cyclical patterns of rise and decline, waxing and waning; and (3) as comparative categories, describing dualistic relationships that

40 For some examples, see Cullen, “Understanding the Planets in Ancient China”; Pankenier, *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China*; Puett, “Innovation as Ritualization” and *To Become a God*; Lai, *Excavating the Afterlife*; Raphals, “Divination and Medicine in China and Greece”; Sterckx, *Of Tripod and Palate*; Rawson, “Cosmological Systems as Sources of Art, Ornament and Design”; Ning, “*Xiang*, *dao*, and the Unity of Arts”; Brindley, *Music, Cosmology, and the Politics of Harmony in Early China*; Milburn, “*Gai Lu*”; Yates, “New Light on Ancient Chinese Military Texts”; Unschuld, *Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen: Nature, Knowledge, Imagery*; Wang, *Order in Early Chinese Texts*. In Chinese, see for example, Hu, *Zhongguo zaoqi fangshu yu wenxian congkao*; Li, *Zhongguo fangshu zhengkao* and *Zhongguo fangshu xukao*; Song, *Zhongguo shushu wenhua shi*; and Zhang, *Fangshu yu Zhongguo chuantong wenhua*.

41 The classic work on Chinese correlative cosmology is Graham, *Yin-Yang and the Nature of Correlative Thinking*. See also Henderson, *The Development and Decline*, esp. 20–28.

were inherently unequal but almost invariably complementary. Similarly, the *wuxing* came to be viewed as cosmic agents identified with phases of change, and linked with various colors, directions, flavors, musical notes, senses, grains, sacrifices, punishments and even moral qualities. *Qi* came to be understood to be not only the “stuff” of which all phenomena were constituted, but also the energy that “makes things happen in stuff.”⁴²

Meanwhile, during the long and illustrious reign of Han Wudi (141–89 BCE.), the *Zhouyi*, now officially amplified by the Ten Wings, had become a bona fide Confucian classic, the *Yijing*. Taken together, its “wings” – the *Dazhuan* 大傳 (Great commentary) and the *Shuoguanzhuan* 說卦傳 (Explaining the trigrams commentary) in particular – transformed the *Changes* into a document of correlative cosmology par excellence.⁴³ Trigrams, for example, came to be known not only by their primary attributes (Qian 乾, “The Creative”; Kun 坤, “The Receptive”; Dui 兌, “The Arousing”; etc.), but also by new associations involving different family relationships, animals, elements, directions of the compass, seasons, parts of the day, parts of the body, social roles, and colors. Other “wings” helped to explain the cryptic *tuan* and line readings of the basic text, and, through the use of colorful analogies, metaphors and other forms of imagery, they elucidated the structure and significance of the hexagrams in terms of their individual lines and constituent trigrams, as well as their relationship to other hexagrams and natural phenomena. The Ten Wings also suffused the *Yijing* with Confucian ethical judgments, and articulated its metaphysical principles, including the fundamental ideas of *yinyang* complementarity and the interaction of the “three [cosmic] powers” (*sancai* 三才): Heaven, Earth and Man. Furthermore, they supplied an important numerological orientation to the classic, based on the idea expressed in the Great Commentary that “a mastery of numbers [that enables one] to know the future is called prognostication” (*ji shu zhi lai zhi wei zhan* 極數知來之謂占).⁴⁴

Much debate surrounds the issue of exactly when and how *yinyang* and *wuxing* correlative cosmology came to be a dominant feature of Han thought. In the eyes of many Chinese and Western authorities, primary credit goes the redoubtable scholar Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (c.198–c.107 BCE) – putative author of a famous work titled *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 (Luxuriant gems of the *Spring and Autumn* [Annals]). But it is plain that the various editions of

42 This is Nathan Sivin's formulation, cited in Smith, *The I Ching*, 52.

43 For an overview of correlative thinking in the *Yijing* and related texts dating from the Han period, see Smith, *Fathoming the Cosmos*, 36–88.

44 See, for example, Sivin, “Change and Continuity in Early Cosmology”; and Smith, “Fathoming the *Changes*.”

this rather disjointed work betray many signs of later interpolations and other adjustments. Michael Loewe argues, for example, “No reference to *Wu xing* [五行] appears in his [Dong’s] authentic writings, and grave doubts have been cast in particular on the authenticity of those chapters of the *Chunqiu fanlu* that are concerned with *Wu xing*.”⁴⁵ Two other much-discussed composite works played a significant role in the development of Han cosmology. One was sponsored by Liu An 劉安 (c.179–122 BCE) and titled *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (The Master of Huainan); the other, sponsored by Ban Gu 班固 (32–92 CE) was titled *Baihu tong* 白虎通 (a.k.a. *Baihu tongyi* 白虎通義 or *Baihu tong delun* 白虎通德論; Comprehensive discussions from the White Tiger [Hall]).⁴⁶

Suffice it to say that at some point toward the end of the Western Han period (206 BCE–9 CE), a state-sponsored world view developed, based on the assumption that certain Confucian values were inherent in the cosmic order, and that human relationships and institutions were reflections of that order. The Han-era “*Tianguan shu* 天官書” (Treatise on celestial offices) of the *Shiji* (Historical records), like the “*Tianwen zhi* 天文志” (Treatise on the heavens) in the *Hanshu*, established an explicit analogy between the realm of Heaven and the realm of Man: Asterisms and stars had their counterparts in government bureaus and official positions, just as divisions of the heavens had their analogues on earth. According to this correspondence theory, which displayed remarkable tenacity in China, proper behavior, proper government and proper rituals contributed to cosmic harmony, while immoral actions and improper relationships disrupted the balance of *yin* and *yang* and *wuxing* forces in the universe, striking a discordant and therefore disruptive note in the cosmic symphony.⁴⁷

As in the late Warring States period, but with ever greater systemization, Han cosmological assumptions and analogies found their way into a great many political, philosophical, religious, divinatory, medical, scientific, musical, military and other texts.⁴⁸ It would be tedious to discuss even a small fraction of these writings, especially since scholars in the West such as Sarah Allan, Erica Brindley, Constance Cook, Mark Csikszentmihalyi, Donald Harper, Marc Kalinowski, Michael Loewe, John Major, Xin Ning, Michael Nylan, David Pankenier, Mu-chou Poo, Michael Puett, Sarah Queen, Lisa Raphals, Edward

45 See Loewe, *Dong Zhongshu*, 39. Cf. [Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒,] *Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn*. Loewe reviews this latter work in no. 64 of the *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo xuebao* 中國文化研究所學報.

46 See, for example, Major et al., *The Huainanzi*; and Tjan, *Po Hu T'ung*.

47 See Pankenier, *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China*.

48 See Loewe, “Divination by Shells, Bones, and Stalks”; see also the sources cited in notes 39–41 above and 50–54 below.

Shaughnessy, Nathan Sivin, Roel Sterckx, Paul Unschuld, Aihe Wang, Robin Yates and Lu Zhao – to name just a few – have done such a splendid job in identifying the emergence and evolution of these texts and traditions during the last three or four centuries before the Common Era.⁴⁹

Let me focus briefly now on the evolution of divinatory traditions during the Western and the Eastern Han (25–220 CE). Again, these have been discussed at length by many of the above-named individuals – Marc Kalinowski in particular.⁵⁰ These scholars have repeatedly pointed out the many shared cosmological assumptions that underlay certain “technical” fields – especially medicine and divination.⁵¹ Kalinowski’s research has also shown how divinatory and religious traditions inherited from the Warring States era were adjusted to changing social and political conditions during the Han (and thereafter). Among the most important new developments he identifies are “the consolidation of the institutions of official divination, the adaptation of the arts of interpreting oracles and portents to contemporary beliefs about nature and the divine, the systematization of divinatory writings and techniques, and finally the participation of literate circles in the diffusion of mantic knowledge in society.”⁵² Regarding the last point, Kalinowski writes:

The standard histories of Han contain a number of stories of individuals who engaged more or less regularly in mantic activities, though not in a professional or official capacity. These men worked in the marketplace (*mai bu yu shi* 賣卜於市), as well as in official settings and private contexts. Their careers were marked by significant social mobility. Some began as low-level officials of a county and rose gradually to high office in the capital; others who became famous never left their own area. Most were initiated in the arts of divination through service to a master (*shi shi* 師事) who might also be their father or other senior relative (*fu ye* 父業). Lineages of mantic experts are sometimes said to have extended

49 Needless to say, all of these scholars have drawn heavily upon, and often, in fact, collaborated actively with, scholars on the Chinese Mainland.

50 See, for example, Kalinowski, “Technical Traditions in Ancient China”; Kalinowski, “Mantic Texts”; Kalinowski, “Divination and Astrology”; Kalinowski, “Diviners and Astrologers under the Eastern Zhou”; Kalinowski [Ma Ke], “Wang Chong sixiang zhong de mingyun yu zhanbu”; Kalinowski, “The *Xingde* 刑德 Texts from Mawangdui”; Kalinowski, “Divination et astrologie dans l’empire Han”; Kalinowski [Ma Ke], “Xian Qin suili wenhua”; Kalinowski, “Les livres des jours (*rishu*)”; Kalinowski, *Wang Chong*; Kalinowski, “The Notion of ‘Shi’ 式.”

51 See Harper, “Physicians and Diviners”; and Raphals, “Divination and Medicine in China and Greece.”

52 Kalinowski, “Divination and Astrology,” 339.

over several generations, ... Another feature common to most of these individuals was that they were educated as classicists (*ru* 儒). Some attended the Academy [*taixue* 太學], which was under the superintendent of ceremonial, and several rose to be academicians (*boshi* 博士). “By day they recited the Classics and at night they observed the stars and constellations” (*zhou song shuzhuan, ye guan xingsu* 晝誦書傳, 夜觀星宿).⁵³

During the Eastern Han, many such individuals continued to teach and transmit mantic knowledge, but often in retirement from public life.⁵⁴

A great deal of scholarly attention in both China and the West has been devoted to daybooks (*rishu* 日書) which, as indicated above, emerged in the Warring States period as a form of calendrical divination and became especially prevalent in the Qin and Han dynasties.⁵⁵ Lisa Raphals describes their basic features and their close connection with evolving Chinese medical traditions:

In hemerological “daybooks” illness are classed into types in order to determine auspicious days for treatment, based on *yin-yang* and Five Phase [*wuxing* 五行] schemata. These techniques eventually coexisted with the more systematized Han dynasty *yin-yang* and Five-Phase medical theories of the *Huangdi neijing* 黃帝內經 [The Yellow Emperor’s inner classic].... It also associates each of the twelve earthly branches with the origin of a particular illness. As Donald Harper has shown, this new approach totally changed the iatromantic encounter by introducing a new kind of predictability based on the inevitability of the sexagenary cycle.⁵⁶

This tendency to correlate stems and branches with *yin, yang* and the *wuxing* found expression in a great variety of Han-era divination systems, including, not surprisingly, the *Yijing*. According to traditional Chinese commentators, there were three main interpretative traditions in the early development of the *Changes*. One was identified with a fifth-generation disciple of Confucius

53 Ibid., 341–42.

54 Ibid., 342ff.

55 See Kalinowski, “Les livres des jours (*rishu*)”; also Harper and Kalinowski, *Books of Fate and Popular Culture*.

56 Raphals, “Divination and Medicine in China and Greece,” 88–89. See also Harper, “Physicians and Diviners.” For a detailed analysis of the *Huangdi neijing*, see Paul Unschuld’s *Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen: Nature, Knowledge, Imagery* and his *Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen: Annotated Translation*.

named Tian He 田何 (c.202–143 BCE), whose teachings were eventually transmitted to three main figures – Meng Xi 孟喜, Shi Chou 施讎, and Liangqiu He 梁丘賀 – all of whom lived roughly between 90 and 40 BCE. A second tradition was associated in part with Meng Xi but primarily with Jiao Yanshou 焦延壽 (c.70–10 BCE) and his famous student, Jing Fang 京房 (77–37 BCE). The third tradition, also connected in part with Meng Xi, was identified primarily with Fei Zhi 費直 (c.50 BCE–10 CE), whose scholarship inspired several influential scholars in the later Han period, including Ma Rong 馬融 (79–166 CE), Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200 CE), Xun Shuang 荀爽 (128–90 CE), and Yu Fan 虞翻 (164–233 CE). A significant point to remember about these lines of transmission is that they display a deceptive clarity. On the ground, intellectual affiliations could be far more complex and problematic.⁵⁷

Another point to keep in mind is that approaches to the *Yijing* varied substantially in the Han – not least because several different versions of the *Changes* circulated during the early Han.⁵⁸ For instance, we know that the Mawangdui 馬王堆 silk manuscript of the *Yijing*, sealed in the second century BCE and unearthed in 1973, departs in several significant respects from later “standard” editions of the classic, not least in its ordering of the trigrams and hexagrams. So, it seems, did the ordering scheme of Meng Xi (whose student Jiao Yanshou who supposedly compiled the *Yilin* 易林 (Forest of changes) following Meng’s system. Moreover, one or another version of the *Changes* inspired other works, including not only Yang Xiong’s 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE) *Taixuanjing* 太玄經 (Classic of great mystery) and Wei Boyang’s 魏伯陽 (fl. c.140 CE) Daoist-oriented *Zhouyi cantong qi* 周易參同契 (Token for the agreement of the three according to the *Zhou Changes*), but also a large number of prophetic texts (*chen* 讖) and so-called apocryphal writings (*weishu* 緯書).⁵⁹

The most influential of these were a group of texts known collectively as *Yiwei* 易緯 (*Changes* apocrypha). A book by the distinguished Qing dynasty scholar Zhang Huiyan 張惠言 (1761–1802) organizes various *Yi*-oriented apocryphal texts into nineteen categories, bringing all of the passages that deal with a given theme together in the same section and thus providing a convenient inventory of *Yiwei* exegetical concerns. His categories are: (1) the meanings of the term *Yi* 易; (2) the *Yi* numbers 1, 7, and 9; (3) the arrangement of the classic

57 See Smith, *Fathoming the Cosmos*, 57ff.

58 For discussions of these and other *Yijing*-inspired works, see Smith, *Fathoming the Cosmos*, 71–82.

59 See Smith, *The I Ching*, 76–84.

into “upper” and “lower” sections; (4) the six line positions; (5) the operation of the eight trigrams; (6) Jing Fang’s “six days and seven divisions theory” (*liuri qifen shuo* 六日七分說); (7) the seventy-two calendrical periods; (8) the sixty-four hexagrams “governing” the year; (9) the path of the hexagrams; (10) entering a period of adversity; (11) the *guaqi* 卦氣 system; (12) wind and rain; (13) thunder; (14) frost and drought; (15) assorted anomalies; (16) the phenomena generated by the *qi* of the eight trigrams; (17) the phenomena generated by the *qi* of the sixty-four hexagrams; (18) the phenomena generated by the twenty-four solar periods; and (19) the *Hetu* 河圖 (Yellow River chart) and the *Luoshu* 洛書 (Luo River writing).⁶⁰ From Zhang’s list we can see a clear preoccupation with the related categories of cosmology, divination, calendrical science, numerology, and weather.

Works of this sort would later be associated with the so-called School of Images and Numbers (*Xiangshu xuepai* 象數學派), which emphasized elaborate correlations of all sorts, involving not only various configurations of the trigrams, hexagrams and individual lines of the *Changes*, but also correspondences between these features of the classic and cosmic variables associated with *yin* and *yang*, the *wuxing*, heavenly bodies, divisions of time and space (including stems and branches), numbers (*shu* 數) and so forth. The idea was that an appreciation of these correlations would help to illuminate the cryptic written text, shedding light on the past and providing both divinatory guidance and “scientific” explanations of the cosmos for the present (and future).

Of course correlative schemes of any sort – especially those linked with the mantic arts – naturally invited criticisms, some based on personal or professional rivalries and others based on principle.⁶¹ Wang Chong 王充 (27–c.100 CE), author of *Lunheng* 論衡 (Balanced discourses), is usually viewed as the most vehement, persistent and “scientifically minded” critic of mantic practices in the entire Han period.⁶² In fact, however, his views regarding fate and divination were both ambivalent and inconsistent. On the one hand, he railed against daybooks for their arbitrariness and inconsistency, as well as their lack of classical sanction and the role played by spirits (*shen* 神) in

60 Smith, *Fathoming the Cosmos*, 78.

61 See the discussion in Kalinowski, “Divination and Astrology,” 35ff.; and Smith, *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers*, 31–32. For most Han scholars, the only danger in divination, aside from the possibility of misuse, was the fear that an excessive reliance on fortune-tellers and other occult specialists would encourage fatalism rather than self-assertion, thus undermining the impulse toward moral improvement.

62 For two able Western-language translations of Wang’s *Lunheng*, see Kalinowski, *Wang Chong* and the more dated, but still valuable, two volume study by Alfred Forke, titled *Lun-Heng*. See also Puett, “Listening to Sages.”

them – especially the spirit known as *Taisui* 太歲. He also resisted the idea that *wuxing* or stem-branch correlations could be used in divination, or that Heaven intervened directly in human affairs. On the other hand, it is clear that Wang thought certain forms of divination – particularly omenology, dream interpretation, physiognomy, and use of the *Yijing* – had true mantic value. He wrote, for example, that “The eight trigrams [of the *Changes*] embody the correct way of all under Heaven,” and that Fuxi and King Wen used these fundamental images as devices to govern the world (*qiankun liu zi, tianxia zhengdao, Fuxi Wen Wang xiang yi zhi shi* 乾坤六子，天下正道，伏羲文王象以治世). This, Wang went on to say, was recorded in the classics and believed by all sages (*wen wei jing suo zai, dao wei sheng suo xin* 文為經所載，道為聖所信).⁶³

The problem, Wang thought, was with diviners rather than with divination per se. “It is not,” he claimed, “that divination cannot be used; it is just that diviners prognosticate incorrectly” (*fu bushi fei bu ke yong, bushi zhi zhanren zhi wu ye* 夫卜筮非不可用，卜筮之人占之誤也).⁶⁴ In short, Wang’s principle criticism was against professional diviners (variously described as technicians (*gongji* 工技), *yinyang* specialists (*yinyangjia* 陰陽家), geomancers (*shujia* 術家, his term for them), *wuxing* specialists (*wuxingzhijia* 五行之家), common scholars (*suru* 俗儒), etc.), who were able to delude the general populace. This would become a persistent theme throughout China’s imperial history, although it did little if anything to discourage mantic practices.

What seems quite clear from Wang’s writing is that virtually all of the techniques he describes were widespread and influential in Han times, even if they seemed to be inconsistent in their particulars.⁶⁵ Moreover, there were, in fact, very few systematically minded critics like Wang. One reason may be, as Paul Unschuld has observed, that in early Chinese medical, mantic and scientific thought *yinyang* and *wuxing* correlations, together with bureaucratic and other analogies, often counted for more than empirical observation – even when, as often proved to be the case, the correspondences and analogies were internally inconsistent or incompatible with one another. According to Unschuld, “the ‘either/or’ question that might be posed by a scientist used to deductive reasoning obviously did not concern a Chinese theoretician or practitioner who thought in terms of systematic correspondence.” Unschuld goes on to say that this phenomenon is one of the basic characteristics distinguishing traditional

63 See Wang Chong, *Lunheng jiaozhu*, 493. Wang begins his essay on divination (*bushi* 卜筮) with the statement that everyone believes in it (*su xin bushi* 俗信卜筮), but that technicians and “common scholars” have the erroneous idea that Heaven and Earth are being interrogated.

64 Wang Chong, *Lunheng jiaozhu*, 484.

65 Kalinowski, “Divination and Astrology,” 352–53.

Chinese thought from modern Western science, and that we should regard as both questionable and misleading any effort “to eliminate this feature of traditional Chinese thought by artificially isolating a coherent and – in a Western sense – consistent set of ideas and patterns from ancient Chinese sources.”⁶⁶

In any case, the wide circulation of Han divination texts – from the *Yijing* and the *Taixuan jing* to various prognostication books and recently excavated hemerological and astrological manuals – testifies to the growing appeal of fortune-telling at all levels of Chinese society. In part, as indicated above, the expansion and sophistication of divining techniques was a product of late Zhou technological, social, and intellectual changes. The Han dynasty’s contribution to the process was to provide state support for a cosmology predicated on the assumption that human beings could comprehend the subtle patterns of change in the universe, and official sponsorship for a great many occult specialists (*fangshi* 方士), who found themselves in a position to obtain wealth, eminence and power by virtue of their ability to tell the future, heal illnesses, or restore cosmic harmony by magical means. So influential were these specialists that from Han times onward, every official dynastic history, as well as many local gazetteers and other sources, contained special sections devoted to biographies of *fangshi*, usually called “technicians” (*fangji* 方技).⁶⁷

Experts in divination and numerology were especially valuable to the throne, since imperial legitimacy depended to such a significant degree on the correct interpretation of portents and on the proper regulation of human affairs. From an administrative standpoint alone the vast and highly centralized Han empire required a standardized calendar so that officials at all levels could operate on the same schedule, and know whether months were long (thirty days) or short (twenty-nine days), and when an intercalary month had to be inserted. An additional factor, inextricably linked to Han cosmology, was the need to determine, on the basis of astrological and numerical calculations, auspicious days and times for royal ceremonies as well as for empire-wide rituals, festivals, and other activities. From the government’s standpoint, the more predictable life was, the better. The throne thus had a vital interest in knowing all it could about the future. At the popular level, too, predictability was a virtue. For this reason, the use of almanacs that indicated days which were auspicious or inauspicious for various ritual and more mundane activities became ever more widespread.

66 Unschuld, *Medicine in China*, 79, 85–86, 91.

67 An appendix to Kalinowski, “Divination and Astrology,” 359–66, provides a chart identifying nearly sixty prominent and/or high-ranking mantic practitioners who appear in the Han histories.

4 Divination and Cosmology in “Medieval” China

One of the most important philosophical developments in the period from the fall of the Han to the Song was a concerted effort on the part of the brilliant “neo-Daoist” Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249) to strip away the astrological, calendrical and numerical symbolism that the *Yijing* had acquired from Jing Fang, Zheng Xuan, Xun Shuang, Yu Fan and other Han commentators. His basic view, eloquently expressed in the *Zhouyi zhu* 周易注 (Commentary on the *Zhou Changes*), was that the *Yijing* was not a book of divination. Rather, it was a philosophical work that provided guidance for individuals facing the specific circumstances described by the sixty-four hexagrams.⁶⁸

He thus had no patience for Han interpretive techniques such as the system of overlapping trigrams (*hugua* 互卦), hexagram changes (*guabian* 卦變), and the application of *wuxing* and other correlations to the *Yijing*. In the excerpt below, his contempt is palpable:

When the “overlapping trigrams” method proved inadequate, ... people went on further to the “hexagram change” method, and when this “hexagram change” method proved inadequate, they pushed on even further to the “five agents” method, for once they lost sight of what the images originally were, they had to become more and more intricate and clever. Even though they sometimes might have come across something [concerning the images], they got absolutely nothing of the concepts. This is all due to the fact that by concentrating on the images one forgets about the ideas. If one were instead to forget about the images in order to seek the ideas they represent, the concepts involved would then become evident as a matter of course.⁶⁹

For Wang Bi, as for Wang Chong, the omens or images of the *Yijing*, did not have fixed meaning. The auspiciousness or inauspiciousness of a hexagram depended entirely on how well a person responded to the situation represented by a given hexagram. Hence, in Wang’s commentary, no hexagram is absolutely auspicious, and no hexagram is absolutely inauspicious.⁷⁰

Wang’s interpretation of the *Yijing* exerted a powerful influence on other medieval commentators, such as Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (587–684), whose *Zhouyi zhengyi* 周易正義 (The correct meaning of the *Zhou Changes*) was in

68 Hon, “Human Agency and Change.”

69 Cited in Smith, *Fathoming the Cosmos*, 97–98.

70 Hon, “Human Agency and Change,” 230–31.

effect a sub-commentary to Wang's pioneering text. From the Tang dynasty to the Ming, the *Zhouyi zhengyi* was the standard *Yijing* commentary, authorized by the imperial court and tested in the civil service examinations. So influential was Wang's self-consciously subversive effort that many Han dynasty *Yijing* texts simply disappeared in the following few centuries because they were no longer viewed as important to an understanding of the essence of the classic.⁷¹

On the other hand, every major method of divination that existed in the Han period continued to be practiced in subsequent centuries, often enriched by foreign influences as well as domestic developments. During the Six Dynasties period, for example, "imported" Buddhism and indigenous "Religious" Daoism interacted with Confucianism to produce new ways of thinking about the cosmos in general and "destiny" in particular, and although both religious systems developed systems of retribution in the form of either *karma* (ye 業) or "merits" and "demerits" (*gongguo* 功過), Buddhist and Daoist clerics and laypersons alike were not averse to consulting mantic specialists or engaging in mantic practices personally.⁷²

Geomancy or "siting" (*dili* 地理, *kanyu* 堪輿, *fengshui* 風水, etc.) became especially popular during the Six Dynasties era, practiced with particular skill by two famous diviners: Guan Lu 管輅 (210–256) and Guo Pu 郭璞 (276–324).⁷³ Guan Lu also gained enduring fame for his influential theories of "fate extrapolation" (*tuiming* 推命), also known as "emolument fate" (*luming* 祿命). Later practitioners of fate calculation included individuals such as Xiao Ji 蕭吉 (d. c.610), whose still-extant book, *Wuxing dayi* 五行大義 (The great meaning of the "five agents") attempts to show how the activities of the heavens (such as thunder, wind and rain) and groupings of heavenly bodies (such as the twenty-eight divisions of the sky known as "lodges" (*xiu* 宿)) reflect celestial images and numbers; how terrestrial configurations (such as mountains and rivers) and geographical groupings (the three rivers, four seas, five lakes, nine continents, etc.) exemplify earthly images and numbers; and how human activities (such as ritual and music) and groups of people and values (the hundred officials, the four teachings, the seven virtues, etc.) illustrate the images and

71 Ibid.

72 See, for example, Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face*. See also Kalinowski, "La littérature divinatoire dans le Daozang"; Strickmann, *Chinese Poetry and Prophecy*; Sakade, "Divination as Daoist Practice"; Hendrischke, "Divination in the *Taiping Jing*."

73 See Yuan Shushan, *Shu bushi xingxiang xue*, 5: 2a; 6:3b–4a, 13a–b, 20b–21a; also TSJC, *yishu*, 47:5865–77; 6523, 6690, 7047, 7063; and SCC, 2:360; vol. 4, part 1, 296ff.

numbers of human beings. By understanding such images and numbers, Xiao asserts, the workings of the *wuxing* can be fathomed.⁷⁴

Fate extrapolation enjoyed unprecedented popularity during the Tang dynasty (618–907), despite periodic attacks by individual scholars such as Lü Cai 呂才 (600–665), whose historical essay titled “Luming pian 祿命篇,” or “Luming shu 祿命書,” “On emolument fate,” included in the *Tushu jicheng*, became a model for later critics of unorthodox divination.⁷⁵ Li Xuzhong 李虛中 (fl. c.790–835) built on the theoretical foundations laid by Guan Lu and Xiao Ji to become the most illustrious exponent of fate extrapolation in the Tang. Li, whose highly influential *Mingshu* 命書 (Book of fate) is still extant, emphasized the day of birth as the most important single factor in determining one’s destiny. He was later eulogized by the great Confucian scholar Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) for his deep knowledge of *yinyang/wuxing* transformations and for his infallibility as a diviner. To this day he is considered one of the most important figures in the history of Chinese fate calculation.⁷⁶

At various times from 220–907 (and thereafter), the Chinese state and even religious orders attempted to prevent individuals from interpreting portents, making calendrical or astronomical calculations, selecting lucky and unlucky days, engaging in spirit healing and magic, and divining good or bad fortune.⁷⁷ Attempts to constrain divination did not, of course, diminish interest in it, and the state was powerless in any case to control most mantic practices at the local level. In the first place, omen books circulated freely, and Han-style non-official almanacs, designating auspicious and inauspicious days for various activities, became increasingly popular. Furthermore, the invention and spread of printing allowed enterprising entrepreneurs to begin producing illegal versions of the official state calendar itself, much to the dismay of Tang officials. By the tenth century at the latest, the state itself began issuing special editions of the calendar for public consumption. Popular astrology, meanwhile, was encouraged by the growth and sophistication of Religious Daoist star lore, as well as by the introduction and translation of Indian, Iranian and Tantric Buddhist texts.⁷⁸

74 Kalinowski, *Cosmologie et divination dans la Chine ancienne*. See also TSJC, *yishu*, 47:7048, 7063–64.

75 TSJC, *yishu*, 47:6524–25, 7057 and 7061. Lü, it should be noted, like many other such critics, believed in divination, but decried certain mantic techniques and especially the “deception” of professional diviners.

76 Li’s *Mingshu* and Han’s epitaph are discussed in SKQSZM, 109:22b–25a.

77 For some examples, see Smith, “The Legacy of Daybooks,” esp. 339ff.

78 Ibid., esp. 341.

Divination techniques not only developed in sophistication over time, they also spread across space – for instance to the remote city of Dunhuang in present-day Gansu province. Evidence can be found in a pioneering book titled *Divination et société dans la Chine médiévale: Un étude des manuscrits de Dunhuang de la Bibliothèque nationale de France et de la British Library* (2003). This impressive work catalogues some 250 items in a way consonant with traditional Chinese bibliographical categories, but it also does much more. For instance, it provides a remarkably comprehensive study of the place occupied by divination and the “traditional sciences” in the far Western regions of ninth and tenth century China. These materials not only provide us with a wealth of information on little-known mantic practices, such as the “Confucius’ Horse Head Method” (*Kongzi matou bufa* 孔子馬頭卜法), but they also allow us to relate “medieval” divinatory traditions more closely to those of the Qin, Han and Six Dynasties periods. We are thus in a much better position to evaluate critically not only the pioneering work of scholars such as Ngo Van Xuyet (1976) and Kenneth de Woskin (1983),⁷⁹ but also later scholarship based on recent discoveries of early manuscripts and other artifacts at Mawangdui, Baoshan, Wangshan, Shuihudi, and elsewhere. Furthermore, the Dunhuang texts make possible a more sophisticated analysis of the mantic systems that developed in the Song and later periods, a job that remains to be done more thoroughly.

By their careful attention to the difficult Dunhuang materials, the authors of *Divination et société dans la Chine médiévale* have already been able to show that certain practices thought to have arisen in the Song actually had their genesis in earlier periods. Moreover, their explanations of these texts have helped to clarify terms and concepts that have perplexed many students of Chinese divination in the past, myself included. A particularly admirable feature of this project is its effort to elucidate Chinese local history by examining the “social dynamics” of Dunhuang during the late Tang and Five Dynasties era. The various authors show, for example, how diviners operated at the lower levels of Chinese government in this remote area, and how local traditions of divination differed from those operating in the metropolitan bureaucracy and imperial court. These authors also explore the ways divinatory theories and practices were transmitted at the local level and how mantic traditions intersected with institutional Buddhism and Religious Daoism.

79 See Ngo, *Divination, magie et politique dans la Chine ancienne*; and DeWoskin, *Doctors, Diviners and Magicians*.

5 Divination and Cosmology in Late Imperial China

Sui-Tang inventions such as printing, gunpowder and the compass, together with the dramatic social and economic changes that followed in the wake of An Lushan's rebellion (755–763), paved the way for a fundamental transformation of Chinese society in the Song dynasty (960–1279) and thereafter. For our purposes, one of the most important of these changes was the rapid and widespread dissemination of information that came with the expansion of printing in the Song. Liao Hsien-huei 廖咸惠 and Liu Hsiang-kwang 劉祥光 have written extensively about the relationship between printing and divination in the Song period, and the social consequences that attended this development – one of which was a remarkable sharing of beliefs and practices among elites and commoners.⁸⁰ Much of the interest in mantic arts during this period arose as a result of chronic uncertainty and insecurity – insecurity about social and economic changes, competition within the civil service examination system, foreign aggression and so forth. And it was the relentless spread of printing that encouraged the circulation of all sorts of “practical” books – including almanacs and works on divination that gave readers a measure of psychological security in uncertain times. It also gave them a sense of personal agency, particularly in matters of vital concern, including travel, education, assumption of office, marriage and other domestic rituals – notably proper burial for one's family.⁸¹

Another factor contributing to a burst of interest in divination during Song times was a surge of creative scholarship on the *Yijing*, produced by such influential thinkers as Shao Yong 邵雍 (1011–1077), Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–1073), Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1078), Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–85) and his brother, Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107), Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) and Lü Zuqian 呂祖謙 (1137–81).⁸² Another individual, earlier and less famous than any of the above-mentioned, but in certain respects more influential, was Chen Tuan 陳搏 (872–989), a Daoist master who also studied Buddhism, and was the putative founder of a prominent school of Chinese physiognomy.

80 See, for example, Liao Hsien-huei's “Qiqiu shenqi,” and her “Tiyan xiaodao.” See also Liu Hsiang-kwang's “Liang Song shiren yu busuan wenhua,” his “Songdai fengshui wenhua de kuozhan,” and esp. his *Songren richang shenghuo zhong de busuan yu guiguai*. For related works in English, see Liao, “Exploring Weal and Woe”; and Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China*.

81 Discussed in Smith, “The Legacy of Daybooks.”

82 See Smith, *Fathoming the Cosmos*, chap. 5.

A particularly striking feature of *Yijing* scholarship during the Song period was a fascination with cosmological and divinatory charts and diagrams (*tushu* 圖書) – an interest unrivaled in China since the heyday of *xiangshu* 象數 and *chenwei* 讖緯 theories and practices in the Han period. According to most authorities, the person responsible for this development was Chen Tuan. Here is a typical description, by the modern scholar Sun Guozhong 孫國中, of Chen's place in the history of *Yijing* scholarship:

In the Song dynasty, the Daoist priest Chen Tuan, from Hua Mountain, taught the Images and Numbers [*xiangshu* 象數] learning of the *Zhou Changes* to all under Heaven. He also introduced to later generations the Yellow River Chart [*Hetu* 河圖], the Luo River Writing [*Luoshu* 洛書], the Chart of the Former Heaven Sequence [*Xiantian tu* 先天圖], and the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate [*Taiji tu* 太極圖], which had been lost for two thousand years. Thus, *xiangshu* learning enjoyed great prosperity, and the “*He Luo* School” [*He Luo xuepai* 河洛學派] arose. *Yi* scholarship reached its high point in the Song. Zhu Xi combined Images and Numbers learning and Meanings and Principles [*yili* 義理] learning with the three great exponents of the “*He Luo* school” [Shao Yong, with his *Xiantian tu*; Zhou Dunyi, with his *Taiji tu*; and Liu Mu 劉牧 (1011–64), with his *Hetu* and *Luoshu*]. He [Zhu Xi] praised [these three scholars' achievements] at the beginning of his *Zhouyi benyi* 周易本義 [Original meaning of the *Zhou Changes*], and thus established the *He Luo* school's position in the history of *Yi* scholarship.⁸³

Of course, the genealogy of these and other such illustrations, both before and after the Song period, was far more complex than this brief summary suggests – not least because, as indicated previously, there is a large and growing body of literary, historical, and archaeological evidence indicating that ancient versions or prototypes of these charts and diagrams may well have existed in Han, if not pre-Han, times. Nonetheless, Chen Tuan's name will always remain closely linked with the *He Luo* school of *Yijing* learning.

The Yellow River Chart and the Luo River Writing were both numerically oriented cosmic illustrations that inspired all kinds of *yinyang*, *wuxing*, stem-branch, trigram and other correlations, while the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate showed the genesis of the eight trigrams from *Taiji* to *yin* and *yang*, to four “images” of *yin* and *yang*, to the eight trigrams themselves. The Chart of the Former Heaven Sequence took two forms – one representing the predictive

83 Quoted in Smith, *Fathoming the Cosmos*, 114.

capacities of the eight trigrams in a particular order, and the other depicting a square-shaped configuration of the sixty-four hexagrams (in which all the hexagrams in each horizontal row have the same lower trigram), enclosed by a circle-shaped configuration in a different order (in which all *yin* lines at the bottom of the hexagrams are on the right side of the diagram and all *yang* lines at the bottom of the hexagrams are on the left side). Shao Yong believed that by assigning numerical values to these hexagrams, and by correlating them with various sets and subsets of the original four images of the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate, he could explain all phenomena in the world – all qualities, all processes, all things, all conditions, and all relationships.⁸⁴

As Sun Guozhong's account suggests, Zhu Xi – perhaps the most influential Chinese thinker since Confucius himself – was responsible for including these numerological charts into his *Zhouyi benyi*. Zhu's great contribution in the realm of *Yi* learning, as Sun indicates, was to combine aspects of Images and Numbers learning with the moralistic interpretations of the so-called School of Meanings and Principles. Zhu's influential cosmology reflects this wide-ranging synthesis. It involved the following major variables: the Supreme Ultimate, the cosmic forces of *yin* and *yang*, the five agents, principle (*li* 理), and material force (*qi* 氣). In brief, Zhu's view was that the Supreme Ultimate, which generated the cosmic forces of *yin* and *yang*, served as the source (and sum) of the principles, around which *qi* coalesced to comprise all existing phenomena. Things differed according to their natural endowment (i.e., different combinations of the five agents manifested in *qi*), and number (*shu* 數) entered the picture as an index of the way in which *qi* became “divided, limited, joined and measured.”⁸⁵ Zhu's thought, it is worth mentioning, became orthodoxy for the Chinese imperial examination system from 1313 to 1905.

While Song scholars contemplated patterns of cosmic change with the help of the *Yijing*, geomancers investigated the cosmos with the aid of a new device, the compass (*luopan* 羅盤). This south-pointing invention, derived in part from Han dynasty astrolabes or cosmic boards (*shi* 式) and designed explicitly for geomantic purposes, revealed celestial and terrestrial relationships by means of a series of concentric circles marked with standard symbols of time and space, including the eight trigrams, the ten “heavenly stems” and twelve “earthly branches,” the divisions of the heavens known as the twenty-eight “lodges” (*ershiba xiu* 二十八宿), and so forth. Over time, the geomancer's compass became increasingly sophisticated, with up to twenty-four

84 See the discussion of these and other such illustrations in Smith, *Fathoming the Cosmos*, 79–81, 114–20, 179–82.

85 Forke, *World-Conception of the Chinese*, 137–42.



FIGURE 3.1 An illustration of some Hetu and Luoshu correlations

SOURCE: JIANG YONG 江永. *HE LUO JINGYUN* 河洛精蘊 [THE QUINTESSENCE OF THE YELLOW RIVER CHART AND THE LUO RIVER WRITING], 1756. TAIWAN REPRINT, N.D.

concentric rings and symbolic variables that applied to several different divination systems.⁸⁶

Similarly, fate extrapolation grew more complex. Whereas the techniques of Li Xuzhong and his predecessors in the Tang involved at most a consideration of the year, month and day of birth, later diviners – notably the tenth-century hermit Xu Ziping 徐子平 and his many followers – took into account the hour as well. These “four pillars” (*sizhu* 四柱) of destiny, each designated by two characters, came to be known as one’s “eight characters” (*bazi* 八字), a common term in Chinese personal fate calculation to this day.⁸⁷

All the while almanacs and divining manuals became ever more accessible to the general public. So did certain versions of official state calendars, which, like almanacs, designated “lucky” and “unlucky” days for various activities and identified a variety of benevolent and malevolent “star-spirits” (*shen* 神 and *sha* 殺 or 煞, respectively). Previously, days had been designated primarily by cycles of the moon and/or correlations with the sexagenary system of stems and branches, but Song calendrical specialists combined elements of other zodiacal traditions to create a synthetic system involving correlations between the twenty-eight lodges, foreign-inspired seven-day weeks, the sixty days of the sexagenary cycle, and the incorporation of twenty-eight symbolic animals, which were organized into four groups of seven. The result was a “perpetual” calendar based on recurrent cycles of 480 days, calculated in terms of seven successive epochs (*yuan* 元). This system of infinitely recurring time-periods continued into the Yuan, Ming, and Qing.⁸⁸

A heightened awareness of the written language through the printed word seems to have been at least partially responsible for the popularity of “dissecting” or “fathoming” characters (*chaizi* 拆字 or *cezi* 測字) as a form of divination during the Song period and thereafter. The acknowledged progenitor of this art in late imperial times was the eleventh century savant Xie Shi 謝石. Printing also contributed to the mass appeal of divination by “spiritual sticks” (*lingqian* 靈籤), which, like many fortune-telling techniques in the late imperial era, came to be practiced in or near Buddhist, Daoist and other religious temples.⁸⁹

One of the most interesting and enduring innovations in Chinese divination during the Tang-Song period was “spirit-writing” (*fuji* 扶箕 or *fuluan*

86 For exquisite detail on the *luopan*, see Feuchtwang, *An Anthropological Analysis of Chinese Geomancy*, 37–58. On the cultural influence of Chinese geomancy in East Asia, see Smith, “Divination and Globalization”; and Smith, “The Transnational Travels of Geomancy,” parts 1 and 2.

87 Xu Ziping, *Yuanhai ziping*. For a summary of his career, see BRZ, 22:13–14.

88 See Smith, “The Legacy of Daybooks.”

89 See Smith, *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers*, 235ff. See also BRZ, 21:4.

扶鸞), in which “possessed” images, objects, and individuals conveyed messages about the present and future. Early spirit possession in China did not generally involve literacy, but by the eleventh century CE it had come to be associated closely with the scholarly elite. Over time, the *fuji* tradition merged with the “morality book” (*shanshu* 善書) tradition of popular religion, with the result that entire volumes came to be written by deities on ethical themes.⁹⁰

Yet another outcome of the expansion of writing in the Song and later periods was that divination became a common literary theme, reflected not only in poetry, but also in narrative works such as short stories, and later, during the Yuan and Ming dynasties, in plays and novels. Although often the butt of scholarly jokes in popular literature, fortune-tellers were ubiquitous.⁹¹

During the Yuan (1279–1368), Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1636–1911) dynasties, no fundamental changes took place in either the theory or the practice of divination, although during all three of these periods the state did establish prefectural and district schools of divination (*Yinyangxue* 陰陽學) to train functionaries who could “divine auspicious days, and related matters of topography and orientation.”⁹² Meanwhile, of course, the state-sponsored cosmology, as expressed in official calendars and other such astrologically oriented works, continued to be based on the usual major variables: *yin* and *yang*, the *wuxing*, the eight trigrams (in both the Former Heaven and Later Heaven configurations), the *Hetu* and *Luoshu*, various correlative systems involving stems and branches, the twenty-eight lodges, and a constantly growing array of benevolent and malevolent “star-spirits” (*shen* and *sha*). Judging from official documents, such as the Qing dynasty’s *Qinding xieji bianfang shu* 欽定協紀辨方書 (Imperially approved treatise on harmonizing the times and distinguishing the directions; 1741), the enormous number of cosmic variables in play, and the innumerable interpretive possibilities they presented, naturally resulted in inconsistencies and outright contradictions (*maodun* 矛盾), which state-appointed astrologers attempted to reconcile.⁹³ But on the whole, the Qing state, like all of its predecessors, affirmed and reinforced the inherited cosmology at every turn, in every way possible – most notably in the production and distribution of the state calendar.

From the Yuan dynasty onward, official calendars issued to bureaucrats and other functionaries (including representatives of tributary states), began

90 See, for example, Clart, “Moral Mediums” and his contribution in this volume.

91 See, for example, Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China*, esp. 61–75. See also note 80 above.

92 Huang, “Court Divination and Christianity in the K’ang-hsi Era,” 4.

93 See Smith, *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers*, chap. 2, esp. 74ff.

to display dozens of auspicious and inauspicious activities in sequential columns, with indications of “appropriate” (*yi* 宜) and “inappropriate” (*buyi* 不宜) behavior for each individual day of the entire year. As I have discussed elsewhere, these calendars encouraged a remarkable degree of cultural conformity, as did popular almanacs (*tongshu* 通書, *lishu* 曆書, *huangli* 皇曆, *huangli* 黃曆, etc.), based, like their predecessors from earlier periods, on the same cosmological principles as official calendars. Evidence from the Qing period strongly suggests that virtually everyone in China – elites and commoners alike – based much of their daily behavior on these hemerological documents and their imperatives.⁹⁴

Unlike official calendars, popular almanacs in late imperial times included sections on a wide variety of divinatory techniques in addition to the stipulations of day-columns, such as omen interpretation, fate extrapolation, astrology, geomancy, physiognomy, character dissection, dream analysis, hexagram and trigram consultation, and divination by means of “spiritual sticks.” This sort of material also appeared in encyclopedias of daily use (*riyong leishu* 日用類書), which were almost as ubiquitous and influential as almanacs.⁹⁵ Meanwhile, professional fortune-tellers of every sort seem to have proliferated, both reflecting and contributing to the popularity of divination at all levels of Chinese society. Gong Baoli 宮寶利 has devoted considerable attention to the spread of mantic techniques in the Ming and Qing periods.⁹⁶

It is surprising, therefore, to find that some scholars, notably John Henderson, persist in claiming that “correlative cosmology in general declined after the Han, at least in higher cultures,” and that “although ... [this cosmology] may have dominated Chinese philosophy during the Han period, it was marginal to Song Neo-Confucianism.”⁹⁷ Henderson seems to be on somewhat firmer ground, however, when he discusses the effect of “evidential research” (*kaozheng xue* 考證學) on traditional Chinese learning in the late Ming and early- and mid-Qing. *Kaozheng* scholars of the time, armed with sophisticated philological techniques and motivated by a passionate desire to “seek truth from facts” (*shishi qiu shi* 實事求是), attacked the hitherto sacred texts of Neo-Confucianism as transmitted and annotated by Zhu Xi, and with their

94 For details, see Smith, “The Legacy of Daybooks.”

95 Wu, *Wanbao quanshu*. See also Smith, “The Cultural Role of Popular Encyclopedias in Late Imperial China.”

96 Gong, *Shushu huodong yu Ming-Qing shehui*; Gong, “Qingdai guanshen shushu huodong tanxi”; and Gong, “Qingdai shushu huodong dui jiating shenghuo de yingxiang.” Smith, *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers*, focuses primarily on the Qing period.

97 See Henderson, “Cosmology and Concepts of Nature in Traditional China.”

assault came some criticisms of the state-sponsored cosmology.⁹⁸ According to Henderson, assaults by Qing scholars on correlative cosmology were so effective that the radical intellectual leaders of the New Culture Movement (c.1915–1925) “did not think it necessary to compose a comprehensive [cosmological] critique.” Henderson asserts, moreover, that along with the decline of the traditional cosmology, came “more or less popular criticism” of at least a few of the more prevalent forms of Chinese divination, notably geomancy.⁹⁹

I see no evidence of such a decline. To be sure, the sometimes glaring inconsistencies of the orthodox cosmology invited heavy criticism from Qing scholars such as Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610–1695), Fang Yizhi 方以智 (1611–1671), Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–1682), Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692), Mei Wending 梅文鼎 (1633–1721), Hu Wei 胡渭 (1633–1714), Yan Yuan 顏元 (1635–1704), Yan Ruogu 閻若璩 (1636–1704), Li Gong 李塨 (1659–1733), Jiang Yong 江永 (1681–1762) Hui Dong 惠棟 (1697–1758), Dai Zhen 戴震 (1724–1777), and Zhang Huiyan 張惠言 (1761–1802).

But the critiques of these individuals remained focused narrowly on the faults of one or another schema, rather than on the inherited cosmology as a whole. Moreover, some of the individuals Henderson identifies as critics were, in fact, ardent advocates of correlative cosmology. Listen to Jiang Yong, for example:

Concepts such as *gougu* 勾股 [a traditional system of triangulation] and *chengfang* 乘方 [multiplication squares] in mathematics, the five sounds and six notes [*wuyin liulü* 五音六律] in music, the positions of the seven luminaries [*qiyao* 七曜] in astrology, the *najia* 納甲 and *nayin* 納音 systems of five-agents specialists, the resonant and pure consonants in phonetics, the *li* and *qi* of the geomancers' compass, the *doushou* 斗首 and *qimen* 奇門 methods of day-selection experts, and even the foundations and principles of medicine ... all emanate from the *Hetu*, the *Luoshu*, the trigrams, the hexagrams, their lines.¹⁰⁰

In Jiang's view, all celestial and terrestrial phenomena fit into certain mathematical patterns and regularities which, when revealed in the *Hetu* and the *Luoshu*, guaranteed the comprehensibility and commensurability of the natural order. Thus, for example, the degrees of the celestial sphere, the zodiacal

98 For a convenient discussion of “evidential learning” and the scholarly controversies surrounding it, see Quirin, “Scholarship, Value, Method, and Hermeneutics in Kaozheng.”

99 Henderson, *The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology*, 196–97.

100 Cited in Smith, *Fathoming the Cosmos*, 185.

signs, and the twenty-four fortnightly periods were all derived from the *Hetu* and *Luoshu*. So were mathematical harmonics and the pitch-pipe, which Jiang linked, in turn, with standard units of length, capacity, weight and even money.¹⁰¹

Fang Yizhi had a similar view of the cosmos. In conjunction with his father, Fang Kongzhao 方孔炤 (fl. c.1630), Yizhi developed an interpretation of the natural world that relied heavily upon numerologically oriented documents of the same sort. He wrote, for example, that “the images and numbers of the *Hetu* and *Luoshu* provide verification for all [things in nature]” (*He Luo xiangshu wei yiqie zhi gongzheng* 河洛象數為一切之公證).¹⁰²

In fact, no prominent Confucian scholar denied the idea of a spiritual link between man and the cosmos, and none proved willing to abandon correlative thinking altogether. For every critic of systems builders such as Jing Fang, there were dozens, perhaps hundreds, of Qing scholars who held closely to their views. Moreover, the seventeenth and eighteenth century emphasis on “Han Learning” (*Hanxue* 漢學), which was closely related to the School of Evidential Research, led, paradoxically, to a revival of interest in ancient cosmology. Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞 (1850–1908) might declare that by late Qing times no one believed in the Yellow River Chart and the Luo River Writing anymore, but this was assuredly not the case.

Like many Chinese scholars, the imperial government periodically denounced the very mantic practices it employed. But here again, the problem was not with the theory of divination; only with the practice. Both the Qing state and the scholars who supported it drew a sharp distinction between their own theories of cosmic correspondence and “knowing fate,” and those of professional fortune-tellers, who selfishly deluded and exploited their “ignorant” clients. The compilers of the *Qinding xieji bianfang shu* repeatedly criticized practitioners of the “occult arts” (*shushi* 術士) for their wrong-headed notions, even as they enthusiastically embraced and articulated at length the same fundamental cosmological assumptions and even many of the same practices. As in the case of religion, the Qing elite made a sharp (though somewhat artificial) distinction between their own “enlightened” beliefs and the “crude” customs of the popular masses, often masked by the rhetoric of Confucian morality. There was essentially a class prejudice, masquerading as a matter of principle.¹⁰³

101 Ibid., 185–86.

102 See the full discussion in Zhu, *Yixue zhexue shi*, 3:336ff.

103 Significantly, the preface to the popular fortune-telling book by Wang Weide 王維德, published in 1709 and titled *Bushi zhengzong* 卜筮正宗 (Orthodox divination), indicates

6 Concluding Remarks

Why did divination last so long and penetrate so deeply into Chinese society? One important reason is that it both embodied and reflected many of the most fundamental features of traditional Chinese civilization. Although divination always had a certain heterodox potential, it was not fundamentally a countercultural phenomenon. On the contrary, it remained an integral part of the most important state and domestic rituals, from official sacrifices to life-cycle ceremonies.¹⁰⁴ Enjoying abundant classical sanction and a long history, Chinese mantic practices, in their richness and variety, followed the main contours of Chinese thought. Most forms of Qing divination were eclectic, “spiritual,” associational, tradition-bound, and highly moralistic.¹⁰⁵ These qualities fit comfortably in a syncretic society whose dominant class esteemed ancient Confucian values, relied heavily on correlational logic, believed in a spiritual link between Heaven, Earth, and Man (which made divination possible, after all), and saw “knowing” as an activity in which “the rational operations of the intellect were not sharply disconnected from what we [Westerners] would call intuition, imagination, illumination, ecstasy, aesthetic perception, ethical commitment, or sensuous experience.”¹⁰⁶

Divination also had a visceral appeal, quite apart from the obvious aesthetics of geomancy. Even mundane practices, such as the use of divining blocks and spiritual sticks, generally took place in comforting and familiar environments, either at home or in religious temples. Professional fortune-tellers, for their part, employed a colorful and universally resonant symbolism in conveying their often-poetic messages. This symbolism was deeply imbedded in the consciousness of Chinese at all levels of society. Allusions to historical, classical, and mythological figures in divinatory statements – derived not only from the Confucian canon and the official dynastic histories, but also from vernacular literature and oral folk traditions – evoked powerful responses in clients, as did appropriate references to certain symbolic colors, numbers, plants and animals.

that many members of the Chinese elite affected disdain for divination, only to use it surreptitiously through the agency of friends or servants. See Smith, *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers*, 74 and 118–19.

104 Much of the following discussion is drawn from, or inspired by, Smith, *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers*, esp. 259ff.

105 These features of traditional Chinese life are discussed at length in Smith, *The Qing Dynasty and Traditional Chinese Culture*.

106 Sivin, “Science and Medicine in Chinese History,” 169–70.

Fortune-tellers invariably surrounded themselves with culturally familiar paraphernalia. Even the most rudimentary fortune-telling table on the street was outfitted with writing materials, books, and calligraphic inscriptions – the marks of scholarly refinement and moral cultivation. More elaborate settings in homes or divination parlors might boast religious icons or spirit tablets, as well as incense and candles, in the fashion of temples and shrines. Visual representations of cosmic power such as the *Taiji tu* and the eight trigrams, which often adorned temples and shrines, divination handbooks, almanacs, and fortune-telling stalls, were also ubiquitous as decorative elements (and charms) in elite and commoner households alike.

The rituals of divination were similarly satisfying and culturally familiar to all clients. Ceremonies such as the burning of incense, which invested divinatory procedures with an explicitly spiritual if not a magical aura, had a truly universal appeal. The use of writing by diviners not only enhanced their social prestige, but it also gave them cosmic leverage, since so many Chinese believed that written words had magical power.¹⁰⁷ Meanwhile, the theatrical performance of fortune-tellers contributed to their public charm. In several respects patronizing a diviner was like watching a play, or even participating in one. Dramatic forms of divination such as spirit-writing and other types of spirit possession held audiences spellbound; but even the more subdued rituals of physiognomy, fate extrapolation and word analysis attracted passers-by on the streets, in marketplaces, and at temples throughout China. Although private fortune-telling parlors existed, and a number of people consulted diviners in the privacy of their homes, Chinese divination was fundamentally a public affair. This was yet another reason why most Chinese subjects simply took it for granted.

The close link between divination and traditional Chinese medicine in the Qing period probably contributed to the tenacity of both. Much of *lingqian* divination revolved around illness and remedies for it (including prescriptions), and physiognomy overlapped considerably with the professional practice of physicians. Despite the great diversity of medical and mantic theory in late imperial times, doctors and diviners shared many of the same cosmological assumptions about systematic correspondence as well as demonology.¹⁰⁸

107 See, for example, De Forges, “Burning with Reverence.”

108 Smith, *The Qing Dynasty and Traditional Chinese Culture*, 363–65. At least fifteen percent of the 1200 or so BRZ biographies I examined for the Qing period refer to individuals who were doctors/diviners – or who at least knew both medicine and divination (*yibu* 醫卜). See also Bretelle-Establet, “Chinese Biographies of Experts in Medicine.”

Although the Confucian classics and a number of popular proverbs emphasized that health and longevity were predestined, few individuals in Qing China accepted their fate passively. All segments of Chinese society sought to know and alter their future, medical or otherwise, and they attempted to do so with the assistance of shamans and other fortune-tellers, as well as more conventional healers – sometimes in combination. From an elite perspective, the more room for autonomous moral choice, the more esteemed the method of divination; but all forms of fortune-telling were considered valuable if the fate divined could somehow be modified.

People in traditional China believed that they could manipulate their destiny by moral or magical means. In truth, the two sources of power were closely related. For the scholarly elite, the same “spiritual” capacity that made foreknowledge possible, gave those who had developed their sincerity to the utmost the ability to transform their own lives in concert with Heaven and Earth. Theirs was a kind of cosmological mind-magic, sanctioned by no less authority than the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Doctrine of the mean) and *Yijing*. For commoners, charms and the advice of soothsayers might do the trick. One could even circumvent the stipulations of calendars and almanacs if armed with the proper cosmological information or assistance.¹⁰⁹

Chinese attitudes toward fate, then, seldom crippled initiative.¹¹⁰ But the idea of inescapable destiny served as a convenient explanation for adversity and disappointment. Thus, we find that even Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811–1872), a staunchly Confucian and highly successful scholar-official known for his rectitude and determination, once remarked during a difficult phase of the Taiping Rebellion that fate determined seventy percent of a situation, leaving only thirty percent to man’s exertions. And Guo Songtao 郭嵩燾 (1818–1891), a hard-working and dedicated scholar who had the misfortune to assume a career in late Qing foreign affairs, went so far as to ask that his obituary end with the following remark: “I don’t believe in books; I believe in luck” (*bu xin shu xin qiyun* 不信書信氣運).¹¹¹

Another point to keep in mind is that in imperial China, divination did not stand as starkly opposed to either “science” or “religion” as it did in Europe, especially after the seventeenth century. To be sure, Chinese scholars in the late imperial era were well aware of the expanding parameters of knowledge about the natural world, and of an increasing ability to predict accurately; but scientifically-minded individuals of the Qing period had neither a religious

109 See BRZ, 17:8–9; 17:19–20; 18:10; 20:4–5; etc.

110 See, for example, QBLC, *fangji*, 105; see also BRZ, 17:8–9, 19–20, 18:10, 20:4–5, etc.

111 BRZ, 18:11. Cf. Yuan, *Shu bushi xingxiang xue*, 5:14a.

belief in “order” of the sort that inspired their European contemporaries, nor did they hold the conviction that in time all phenomena would yield their ultimate secrets. The typical belief was that “natural processes wove a pattern of constant relations too subtle and too multivariant to be understood completely by what we would call empirical investigation or mathematical analysis. Scientific explanation merely expressed, for finite and practical human purposes, partial and indirect views of that fabric.”¹¹²

Divination thus often passed for science in late imperial times.¹¹³ Although the Qing period witnessed a revival of interest in mathematics, mathematical astronomy, geography, biology and medicine, stimulated in part by the Jesuit educational effort, astrology remained integral to the Chinese scientific tradition.¹¹⁴ The Jesuits themselves reluctantly participated in the practice. New technologies for exploring the heavens brought valuable scientific knowledge to China, but they did not pose a significant challenge to traditional astrological methods – at least in part because the great number of invisible operators, such as “empty” stars or star-spirits, made falsification difficult. So did the complexity of many other divination systems. Furthermore, and more importantly, divination categorized and explained experience in culturally significant ways. The elaborate schemes used by fortune-tellers to analyze heavenly phenomena, earthly forms, personality types, and so forth were undoubtedly more generally well known and persuasive than other systems of scientific explanation available in late imperial China. To the extent that science can be viewed as an “ordering device” for organizing and managing data, divination served Chinese scientific purposes nicely. Certainly this was true, for better or worse, of the hallowed *Yijing*.¹¹⁵

The “spiritual” preoccupations of diviners did not necessarily preclude empirical investigation. It is true that experts in wind, rain, and cloud divination – like other types of Chinese fortune-tellers (and most of the rest of the Qing population) – believed in the influence of supernatural forces. But they were also close and insightful students of meteorology. Exponents of *qimen dunjia* 奇門遁甲 (Hidden stems expertise) and other numerological systems, although concerned primarily with cosmological calculations to determine

112 Sivin, “Science and Medicine in Chinese History,” 169–70.

113 SSC, vol. 2 documents the contributions of divination to the history of science and technology in China. See also Smith, *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers*, 26–27, 126–29, 264–72, and 282–83.

114 On the development of science in late imperial China, see Smith, *The Qing Dynasty and Traditional Chinese Culture*, esp. 46–47 and 198–206.

115 I have discussed this theme at some length in Smith, *The Qing Dynasty and Traditional Chinese Culture*, esp. 198–205.

auspicious times and locations, often studied military science as part of their training. Geomancers used mystical “compasses” to identify lucky sites and times for building and making repairs, but they also knew a great deal about landforms and hydraulic systems – information of value in public works as well as military affairs. In all, geomancy probably exerted a more profound influence on the physical environment, and the way the Chinese responded to it, than most other “natural sciences” of the time.¹¹⁶

An especially significant reason for the prevalence and persistence of divination in Qing China was the multi-faceted social role it played. In the first place, it contributed to social order by regulating the rituals and rhythms of daily life. Few devices were more powerful as mechanisms for structuring society than the stipulations regarding lucky and unlucky days in Chinese calendars and almanacs. In fact, private *tongshu* were sometimes proscribed precisely because they did not follow the official calendrical model closely enough, thus inviting confusion of the social order. Secondly, Chinese fortune-tellers served as the functional equivalent of modern-day psychologists.¹¹⁷ As therapists and personal counselors, they helped individuals in China to cope with their anxieties, whether inspired by bureaucratic problems, the examination system, or more mundane concerns. Divination clarified the source and nature of difficulties, alleviated doubt, and invested lives with longed-for meaning. It also empowered people with a special kind of cosmic knowledge and perhaps endowed them with greater self-confidence.

Furthermore, the optimistic thrust of techniques such as *lingqian* divination and dream book interpretation provided hope in times of uncertainty and fear, as did geomancy, with its alluring promise of cosmic control. Exponents of fate extrapolation and physiognomy gave individuals a glimpse of their long-term future, as well as concrete advice on how to contend with seemingly inescapable problems. Methods such as word analysis (*chaizi* 拆字 or *cezi* 測字) did the same for more immediate issues, while personal consultation of the *Yijing* offered ways of “resolving doubts” that emphasized introspection and personal initiative. Spirit-writing associations not only provided a sense of group identity outside the family, but also offered hope for individuals excluded from conventional routes to social and economic advancement. By various means, not all equally effective, divination in Qing China restored “value and significance to lives in crisis.”¹¹⁸

116 I have discussed these themes at length in chapters 4–6 of *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers*.

117 See Smith, “The Psychology of Divination in Cross-Cultural Perspective.”

118 See Zuesse, “Divination,” 375–82, esp. 380.

But fortune-tellers were more than personal therapists. In a society such as China's, where so many aspects of life and thought hinged on compromise and conciliation, and where intermediaries were essential to all forms of social intercourse, diviners proved to be cultural middlemen par excellence, mediating not only between the client and the cosmos, and between Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist versions of "reality," but also between contending elements within their own local communities, from quarreling couples to feuding clans. Some relied primarily on their psychological skills and verbal ability to settle disputes. Others made use of their comparatively intimate knowledge of the personal histories and local connections of many community members. Still others, notably shamans, called upon supernatural authority to develop and maintain group consensus, thus bringing order out of confusion.¹¹⁹

Diviners also helped bridge the gap between commoners and the elite in traditional China. Robert Weller is correct, of course, in pointing out that people involved in different social relations may well interpret rituals – including those of divination – in different ways, and that their divergent interpretations may, in turn, lead them to different political and social strategies. On the basis of research in modern Taiwan he argues, for example, that whereas popular geomancy "ties into the personified bureaucracy of gods, ghosts and ancestors," and thus tends to support prevailing community and kinship values, elite geomancy "channels reinterpretation through its institutions, and has greater possibilities to justify politically improper behavior (like fraternal competition) because it relies on impersonal forces."¹²⁰ But this contrast may be a bit too stark; for popular geomantic practices did not always conduce to social harmony, and elite *fengshui* practices did not always reflect a potentially divisive reliance on "impersonal forces."

Despite its obvious merits as a strategy for contending with the complexity of traditional Chinese society, Weller's stress on the diversity of social interpretation over the uniformity of cultural codes may lead us to underestimate the power of such codes – at least with respect to divination. On the whole, I continue to be struck by the degree to which Qing dynasty mantic methods not only reflected shared assumptions but also supported the prevailing social order, regardless of who undertook them or for whom they were undertaken. Most Chinese divination techniques offered little if any possibility for social subversion, and although geomancy undeniably created family and community tensions, it is hard to imagine that the Chinese scholarly elite would have given so much support to a practice that they viewed as fundamentally

119 See Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts and Ancestors*, 85–86.

120 Weller, *Unities and Diversities in Chinese Religion*, 147–55.

detrimental to its own interests. Even spirit-writing was used far more often to maintain local power structures than to overthrow them.¹²¹

By summoning up visions of orthodox heroes and urging clients to embrace conventional values, fortune-tellers of all social classes reinforced the hegemonic literati culture. For this reason, among others, certain of them received commendation by local officials for their skill as prognosticators. Peng Tianlun 彭天綸, for one, got an honorific plaque that read “He is able to know the future” (*keyi qianzhi* 可以前知) – a phrase instantly recalling the rare and admirable quality of foreknowledge touted by Mencius (who claimed, incidentally, to possess it).¹²² But the process of cultural transmission was not one of downward movement only. Popular values also found their way to the upper levels of Chinese society in the course of divination. Although the exact nature of this two-way interaction cannot be documented with precision, we know that at least some fortunetellers had both elites and commoners as clients and that a number of non-elite diviners enjoyed close relations with the literati by virtue of their unusual and much-coveted skills.¹²³ Furthermore, it is clear that certain divinatory media, spirit-writing in particular, conveyed messages that were suffused with elements from the Chinese folk tradition as well as Confucian “high culture.” As with the Ma Yuan 馬援 and Qu Yuan 屈原 cults of the late imperial era, elites and commoners drew on “overlapping repertoires of images and associations,” cycling and recycling “symbols, motifs and attitudes between the oral and regional and the literary and cosmopolitan sectors of Chinese culture.”¹²⁴

The special talents of diviners, from weather prediction and siting to the evaluation of personnel, made them valuable not only to Qing officials but also to the leaders of their own communities. Fortune-tellers helped to maintain the mechanisms of local defense and control, undertook famine relief, managed schools, and supervised public works projects. Some used their special talents to help neighbors find lost or stolen property, while others provided free advice and medical assistance to their local areas in times of crisis. These altruistic activities helped diviners to overcome the common stereotype of

121 See Smith, *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers*, 221–30; also Elman, *A Cultural History of the Civil Examinations*, chap. 6, *passim*.

122 BRZ, 28:2. Cf. CC, 2:363 and 370.

123 For other instances of close relations between diviners and members of the scholarly elite, see BRZ, 1:24; 3:8–9; 5:13, 22; 7:17–18, 22–23; 10:9; 12:13; 14:12–13; 15:8–9; 18:13–14, 19–20, 24–25; 20:18, 27; 21:19–20; 23:16–17; 26:5–6; 28:15; 33:17; 34; 22:15; etc. For friendships between divining monks and officials and gentry, see BRZ, 38:43.

124 Sutton, “A Case of Literati Piety,” esp. 113; see also Schneider, *A Madman of Ch’u*, 155ff.

being devious and selfish, and brought them more fully into the mainstream of Chinese community life.¹²⁵

Finally, in attempting to account for the remarkable staying power of divination in China, we should bear in mind institutional factors. For one, the religious establishment in late imperial times did not actively attempt to suppress divination in the fashion of the Christian Church in the West. Rather, Buddhist and Daoist temples and monasteries supported a wide range of divinatory activity, undertaken by religious functionaries and professional fortune-tellers as well as lay persons. In fact, the apocrypha of both religious traditions in China included special texts on divination, such as the Buddhist *Zhancha shan'e yebao jing* 占察善惡業報經 (Classic of divining the requital of good and evil actions).¹²⁶ Furthermore, Chinese monks and priests did not have the institutional power to challenge long-standing mantic traditions, even if they had the will, for the Buddhist and Daoist establishment in China remained fundamentally subordinate to the imperial Confucian state.

And, as mentioned above, the Chinese government, for its part, reinforced the inherited cosmology and sanctified orthodox mantic practices at all levels. Edicts and other official announcements constantly referred to auspicious and inauspicious dates, times, events and omens; the state calendar institutionalized divination empire-wide by designating certain days as “appropriate” and “inappropriate” for various activities; and bureaucrats availed of divination in all kinds of civil and military situations. Without fully realizing it, the Chinese government was as much in the grip of the future as it was of the past. For the emperor to dispense with divination would be to abandon his cosmological claim to kingship – an abdication of his role as mediator between Heaven and Earth.

In short, well over three thousand years of development had produced in China a colorful patchwork of mantic beliefs and practices that were neither internally consistent nor universally admired, but which nonetheless had become essential to the conduct of Chinese daily life. Throughout this period, new divining techniques grew out of new historical circumstances, but old practices were seldom abandoned entirely. After some initial reluctance, Buddhism and Religious Daoism embraced divination and contributed to its popularity. Reunification of the empire, together with dramatic new intellectual and technological developments in the Tang-Song era, brought a

125 These services and others are discussed at length in Smith, *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers*, esp. chap. 4–7.

126 See the contribution by Esther-Maria Guggenmos in this volume.

knowledge of divination to virtually everyone in Chinese society, high and low, and to many people outside of China as well. The new print culture of the late imperial era, which included storybooks, drama, and eventually novels, reflected the pervasiveness of divination as a social phenomenon. So did the orthodox dynastic histories of every era, not to mention local gazetteers, encyclopedias, and other reference works. The editors of the *Tushu jicheng* in the Qing period thus had a vast store of material to draw upon in putting together their several large subsections on divination. The important point to keep in mind is that the techniques and works included in this monumental work were, and are, part of a living and still vital tradition.

Abbreviations

- BRZ Yuan Shushan 袁樹珊. *Zhongguo lidai buren zhuan* 中國歷代卜人傳 [Biographies of diviners in China by dynastic periods]. Shanghai: Rude shuju, 1948. A new, consecutively paginated 1998 edition was published in Taipei by the Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi.
- CC Legge, James. *The Chinese Classics*. 5 vols. London and Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893–95.
- QBLC Xu Ke 徐珂, ed. *Qingbai leichao* 清稗類鈔 [Classified anecdotes from the Qing]. 1916. Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1928.
- SCC Needham, Joseph et al. *Science and Civilisation in China*. 7 vols. (some divided into several separately published parts). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1956–present.
- SKQSZM Ji Yun 紀昀 et al., eds. *Qinding siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* 欽定四庫全書總目提要 [Reviews from the *Complete Collection of the Four Treasuries*]. Reprint, Taipei: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1983.
- TSJC Chen Menglei 陳夢雷 et al., eds. *Qinding gujin tushu jicheng* 欽定古今圖書集成 [Imperial edition of the complete collection of illustrations and writings, past and present]. 1726. Reprint, Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1977.
- XJBFS Yun Lu 允祿. *Qinding xieji bianfang shu* 欽定協紀辨方書 [Imperially approved treatise on harmonizing the times and distinguishing the directions]. Beijing, 1724; reprint, Taipei, 1974.
- YJJC Yan Lingfeng 嚴靈峰, ed. *Yijing jicheng* 易經集成 [Compendium on the *Classic of Changes*]. Taipei: n.p., 1975.

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Typology and Classification of the Mantic Arts in China

Marc Kalinowski

The idea that mantic arts occupied a prominent place in ancient China is neither a new fact, nor has the importance of mantic arts been any different in other pre-modern societies. While it has been recognized that divination is the most commonly shared activity in the world,¹ opinions diverge as to the meaning of the word “divination,” which translates the Latin *divinatio*, itself derived from *divinus* meaning “related to the divine” or “by divine inspiration.” Cicero (106–43 BCE) who has introduced the term in the Latin language to translate the Greek *mantikē* defined it as “the foresight and knowledge of future events.”² In modern China, the standard term for “divination” is *zhanbu* 占卜, a word that does not subsume a faculty proper to the human mind, and even less divine inspiration: *zhan* originally meant “to prognosticate” and *bu* “to crack a divining bone or turtle shell.”³

We would certainly be experiencing difficulty in finding in ancient texts a single term that covers the whole range of practices related to divination. What one generally finds are expressions referring to types of diviners and to specific mantic methods. Moreover, if divination may be seen primarily as the art of prognosticating future events, its functions differ, depending on the object sought by the procedure: approval from the ancestors and gods, legitimation of important events, knowledge of human destiny, or answers to questions about activities in everyday life. In early texts, divinatory techniques are often defined by their capacity to break doubts (*jueyi* 絕疑) and to determine the best time and place for a given action (*ding jixiong* 定吉凶). In short, it would be wrong to imagine “that we possess the essence of a thing once we have agreed upon the conventional meaning of a word.”⁴

The present chapter aims precisely at giving a full account of the extreme diversity of forms of divination practiced in China by approaching them

1 See Vernant, et al., *Divination et rationalité*, 9.

2 Cicero, *De divinatione*, 1.1; see also *Cicéron*, 23 and 187m.

3 For more details on the words *zhan* and *bu*, see the section “Terminology and Typology of the Mantic Arts” in the first part of this chapter.

4 Translated from a passage discussing the meaning of the word “religion” in Bergson, *Les deux sources*, 167.

through the lens of classifications that have been proposed for them by local literati and intellectuals over the long term. Such an approach helps us to better understand the place occupied by diviners and astrologers in social hierarchies, the philosophical and doctrinal biases adopted by different actors in order to establish their classifications, and the way in which the authors of these classifications have isolated from the entire set of public and private activities those which in their view fell under the category of mantic arts.

The first part of the chapter covers the period preceding the formation of the first classification scheme for mantic arts at the end of the first century BCE. It starts with a discussion of the most frequently used terms for expressing the action by which the diviner initiates a divinatory process, leading to a proposal for a threefold classification for forms of divination attested to in ancient sources. Then follows an overview of the principal sources which in the transmitted literature account for mantic practices in an institutional context, and for criticisms put forward by contemporary thinkers concerning these practices. Finally, the new perspectives that have been opened due to the discovery of manuscripts during the last five decades will be discussed at greater length. Written on bamboo slips or silk sheets and stored in tombs, the oldest of them is dated to the fourth century BCE.

The second part is dedicated to the bibliographic treatise compiled at the end of the Western Han (206 BCE–6 CE) and taken up again in abbreviated form during the first century CE in the *Hanshu* 漢書 (Book of Han) under the title “Yiwen zhi 藝文志” (Treatise on the arts and letters). The classification of mantic arts established in this treatise constitutes the point of departure of a long tradition and a key reference for all subsequent schemes. Besides the obviously book-based dimension of the classification, the forms of divination catalogued therein – due to the precedence then given to astrology and to the calendar – are almost entirely of the “technical” (*technikē*) or “artificial” (*artificiosa*) type according to the distinction made by Cicero between these and the “non-technical” (*atechnos*) or “natural” (*naturalis*) kinds represented by dreams and spirit-medium vaticinations.⁵ Much attention is paid to the historical and doctrinal context in which the authors of the catalog have conceived their classification because it not only served the purpose of bibliographic organization but also reflected elite intellectual trends and fulfilled the need of court-centered ideology.

5 Cicero, *De divinatione*, 1.11–12, 1.34, and 1.72; *Cicéron*, 29–30, 42–43, and 63. The distinction between technical and natural divination or inductive and intuitive divination is questioned by most of the modern historians of Greek and Roman mantic practices; see the preface by Stella Georgoudi to the re-edition of Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination*, 11–12 and 16–17.

In the third part three important bibliographic catalogs written between the Tang (618–907) and the Qing (1644–1912) are analyzed with the goal to highlight the changes that have occurred during this period in the classification and typology of mantic arts that are given their almost definite shape during the eighteenth century.

The fourth part rounds off the preceding one by a comparison between classifications established by bibliographers and those that can be found in imperial encyclopedias (*leishu* 類書). In both cases, the tendency is to group mantic arts into about half a dozen major systems, which are then taken up again in modern studies on Chinese divination. Lastly, the so-called encyclopedias for daily use (*riyong leishu* 日用類書) from the Ming (1348–1664) and the Qing are briefly mentioned, as is research conducted by anthropologists and historians of late imperial China, whose distinctive contribution was to include in their classifications forms of divination previously considered as falling outside of the realm of mantic arts, such as spirit possession and spirit-writing.

1 From the Shang to the End of the Western Han

Even if the history of the classification of mantic arts in ancient China starts in the second half of the first century BCE when the imperial collections were recast, written accounts from preceding periods (Shang oracle-bone inscriptions dating from the late second millennium up to the literature from the Warring States, 453–221 BCE, and the early Western Han) deserve consideration for several reasons. First of all, scholars who have devised the first classifications had as their goal to provide a comprehensive overview of the writings of all time that they felt worthy to be reproduced and kept in the imperial storehouses. Given the uncertainties about the nature of their editorial work and the dating of pre-Han writings – and given the fact that none of the book titles belonging to the category of mantic arts as established in the *Book of Han* bibliographic treatise has a counterpart in the transmitted literature – we have no means to evaluate the degree of reality of their classifications other than to use evidence found in early texts.

Furthermore, archeological discoveries, which follow one another without interruption since more than a century, have led to the update of a considerable number of materials directly related to mantic arts. At present we do have a rich documentation consisting of reports on divinatory activities and on objects manipulated by diviners, but above all we have specialized manuscripts, describing systems of divination of which we previously knew very little. These manuscripts allow for measuring the increase in scale and scope

of the production and transmission of mantic knowledge between the fourth and first centuries BCE. They also increase in a significant way the range of available sources on the basis of which we can evaluate the work undertaken by late Western Han bibliographers.

Finally, it is during this key period of history that ideas and notions that will determine the subsequent development of Chinese civilization in a number of areas take shape. Mantic arts are by no means an exception to this pattern and it seems useful to begin this chapter with a discussion of the most commonly used words to characterize the practice of divination. The discussion is limited to those terms that express the action by which the diviner, professional or amateur, initiates the process that will lead him toward the desired result. This will be an opportunity to introduce, *in statu nascendi*, the basic vocabulary of divination such as it will be reproduced, developed and codified in classifications of mantic arts and more generally in scholarly and popular literature of the following periods. Thus, we will see discrete lexical groups emerge, which shall serve to sketch a typology of divinatory acts, empirical indeed, yet specifically Chinese.

1.1 *Terminology and Typology of the Mantic Arts*

Used alone, the word *zhan* 占, which is part of the generic term translating “divination” in modern Chinese (*zhanbu*), designates the final phase of a divinatory process, notably the phase during which one person makes a forecast, interprets a sign, evaluates a situation, or predicts a future event. This word appears as early as the Shang dynasty in oracle-bone inscriptions of the following kind: (1) the sexagenary day on which a divination was performed by cracking a turtle plastron or a bovine scapula, (2) the name of the diviner followed by an injunction, (3) a prognostic uttered orally by the king, and eventually (4) the verification of the royal prognostic:

Crack-making (*bu* 卜) on day *yimao*₅₂, Nan tested (*zhen* 貞) [the proposal on] rain. The king prognosticated (*zhan* 占): probable on a *ren*_{sg} day. On the day *renwu*₁₉ it indeed rained.⁶

乙卯卜，般貞雨。王占其雨隹壬。壬午允雨。

6 *Heji* 902 recto (*yi* 4524); my reading of this inscription dated to the middle of the thirteenth century BCE follows the transcription in Yao and Xiao, *Yinxu jiagu keci leizuan*, 837. The day of the divination being the fifty-second in the sexagenary day-count cycle (*yimao*₅₂), it took twenty-seven days before the rain finally broke out on the nineteenth day of the next cycle, and the king's prognostication was partly correct since the sexagenary name of that day (*renwu*₁₉) contains the stem-component *ren*_{sg}.

According to the scribes who composed such accounts inscribed on bones and shells, the uttering of a prognostic was, at least formally, a royal privilege. This is no longer the case in the transmitted literature and the excavated manuscripts where the *zhan* are attributed to different historical figures, whether diviners or not. They can consist of short unambiguous prognostics, in some cases of lengthy accounts in which the predictive dimension of the prognostic embraces moral or political considerations, and sometimes of enigmatic verses based on earlier collections of *exempla*, which, in turn, require interpretation. Furthermore, the term *zhan* gradually moves away from its original context and applies to all kinds of mantic techniques, with the more general meaning of “divination.” This is particularly the case in the nominalized uses of *zhan*, as for example in *mengzhan* 夢占 “dream divination” (oneiromancy), *xingzhan* 星占 “star divination” (astrology), and *zhanhou* 占候 “divination by observing (celestial and atmospheric phenomena)” (meteoromancy).⁷

As for the terms that express the action through which the diviner initiates a divinatory process, they are for a large part borrowed from everyday language and only the context allows to assign them a precise technical meaning. The selected terms are the most frequently used in ancient texts, and they can be found in compound words referring to any specific type of divination in the classifications of mantic arts from the end of the Western Han onwards. If we consider their verbal uses, these terms can be classified into three groups.

The first group contains action verbs that denote the process by which the diviner willingly engages in the manipulation of objects in order to produce a result, which he shall use to establish a prognostic. The emblematic term in this group is *bu* 卜, which we have already encountered in relation to Shang oracle-bone divination. The *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (Explaining graphs and unraveling characters), a dictionary compiled during the second century CE, gives the following definition: “Burning a turtle (plastron) to (obtain a) crack: (graph 卜) represents the crack on the turtle (plastron) after it is burnt.”⁸

7 In ancient China, there is no clear demarcation line between atmospheric and celestial phenomena, usually grouped together in early and medieval compendia compiled by experts attached to the astronomical bureaus. My use of “meteoromancy” as a rough translation of the Chinese term *zhanhou* – unattested before the late first century CE – is to be understood as applying primarily to divination by watching for omens related to weather conditions (vapors, clouds, winds, thunderstorms, rainbows, and so forth), but also to those appearing in the sky at large, including halos, parhelia, strange behavior of stars and planets, comets, and eclipses. For a comprehensive survey of the multiple meanings of *zhanhou* in pre-modern China, see Kory, “Omen Watching.”

8 *Shuowen jiezi*, s.v. “Bu”, 3B.19b, 69.

Other terms associated with *bu* describe more specifically the different operations that are necessary to prepare the turtle before applying an incandescent cautery on one of the sides of the animal's plastron. This stresses the bone's other side and produces cracks (*zhao* 兆), which are seen as responding to the "testing" procedure (*zhen* 貞) of the diviner through an appropriate prognostic.⁹ Under the Eastern Zhou (770–256 BCE), turtle divination (*guibu* 龜卜) gives way to the rising power of astrology and hemerology, but it will still benefit from the prestige of its antiquity. Here, too, the term *bu* gradually moves away from its original context and covers the wider meaning of "making a divination," as the following anecdote from the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (Springs and autumns of Master Lü) shows: "Confucius divined (*bu*) and obtained (hexagram) Bi 賁 'Adorned'. He said: 'There is nothing good about this' ..."¹⁰ Rather than having *bu*, one would expect to find *shi* 筮, which the *Shuowen jiezi* defines as follows: "To (produce) the hexagrams from the *Changes*, one uses milfoil stalks (*shi* 蓍)."¹¹ The term *shi* relates indeed to this form of cleromancy associated since at least the fourth century BCE to the prestigious collection of oracles known under the names of *Yi* 易 (*Changes*), *Zhouyi* 周易 (Zhou changes), or *Yijing* 易經 (Classic of changes).

According to the commentaries appended to the Classic under the Han, the process of sorting the stalks consisted in a series of random manipulations carried out with milfoil stalks (*shi* 蓍) or counting rods (*ce* 策 or *suan* 筭). The goal was to produce mantic patterns, the so-called "hexagrams" (*gua* 卦) composed of six solid or broken lines layered one over the other. By consulting the *Changes*, the oracle corresponding to a given hexagram or hexagram line could be obtained. We know today that Shang diviners practiced both turtle divination and milfoil divination, which are typically merged into one in ancient texts (*bushi* 卜筮, "turtle and milfoil divination"). Yet, we know nothing about the materials they used to produce mantic patterns, nor do we know how these patterns composed of numerals comprised between one and nine were understood and interpreted.¹²

9 For an introduction to Shang oracle-bone inscriptions, see the classical work by Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*; see also Takashima, *A Little Primer*. The graph *zhen* (usually translated in modern scholarship as "charge," "injunction," "testing") is defined in the *Shuowen jiezi* as meaning: "To enquire by crack-making" (*bu wen ye* 卜問也); *Shuowen jiezi*, s.v. "Zhen", 3B.19b, 69.

10 *Lüshi chunqiu jishi* 22.4, "Yixing 壹行," 11a, 1049. Bi, "Adorned," is hexagram 22 (Mountain over Fire) in the received version of the *Changes*.

11 *Shuowen jiezi*, s.v. "Shi", 5A.3a, 96.

12 On the numerical hexagrams (*shuzi gua* 數字卦) or "proto-hexagrams" of the Shang and Zhou, see Zhang, "An Interpretation of the Divinatory Inscriptions"; Xing, "Hexagram Pictures"; and Shaughnessy, *Unearthing the Changes*, 12–18.

Besides these two terms, there is *tou* 投 (read as *qu* 取 “to draw”) that plays a key role in the twelve pitch-standard divination described in the hemerological manuscripts found in Fangmatan 放馬灘 tomb 1, Gansu (burial dated to shortly before or after 221 BCE).¹³ It is also not excluded that, by Warring States times, practitioners of milfoil divination used dice to form hexagrams. This is evidenced by the presence of a text on hexagram divination similar to the *Guicang* 歸藏 (Returning to be stored) in Wangjiatai 王家臺 tomb 15, Hubei (burial dated to the second half of the third century BCE), since in addition to the text known through the transmitted literature as an alternative to the *Changes*, other significant objects were found in the tomb, such as three sets of dice, of which some have six sides.¹⁴ This is worth mentioning given the subsequent undisputed success of mantic methods based upon the throw of dice (*zhitou* 擲骰) and the drawing or sorting of stalks (*quqian* 取籤, *chouqian* 抽籤).

The second group is represented by verbs of perception. In these occurrences, a person perceives a sign, a thing, or an event that emerges spontaneously. Due to their calamitous (*zai* 災), unusual (*yi* 異), and most often erratic (*bian* 變, *guai* 怪) nature, these phenomena are perceived as portentous signs. It is the diviner's task to decrypt and interpret their hidden meaning, based upon his own experience or by consulting collections of precedents. All sense organs may be solicited. In military divination, for example, one finds specialists for listening to sounds from the enemy camp in order to predict the outcome of a battle.¹⁵ Prognostics were also drawn from the sounds made by a hot caldron on the stove (*fu ming* 釜鳴)¹⁶ or the barking of dogs. Physical sensations (body omens), such as ringing in one's ears, itching and nervous tics were also subject to predictions.¹⁷

13 On the mantic system based on the twelve pitch-standards (*zhonglü zhan* 鐘律占) in the Fangmatan manuscripts, see Kalinowski, “Théorie musicale”; and Cheng, “Xiaoyi Qin Han jian,” 169–74.

14 For a photograph of the Wangjiatai dices, see Kalinowski, “Divination and Astrology,” 349; on their possible link with hexagram divination, see Lewis, “Dicing and Divination,” 4. The published fragments of the *Guicang* are translated in Shaughnessy, *Unearthing*, 141–87. For another method possibly using the casting technique, see n54 in this chapter.

15 *Shiji* 27, “Tianguan shu 天官書,” 1341, describes a method for predicting a good or bad harvest for the coming year by listening (*ting* 聽) to the clamor rising from villages and towns.

16 For a slip fragment mentioning the “caldron method” (*fufa* 釜法) in the Han excavated texts, see *Yinqueshan Han mu zhujian*, 2:238. The caldron method is also attested in the Dunhuang medieval manuscripts; see Despeux, “Auguromancie,” 441–42.

17 For evidence in the Han excavated texts, see Rao, “Juyan jian shushu”; in the Dunhuang medieval manuscripts, see Despeux, “Auguromancie,” 449–51; and in late imperial times, see Smith, *Fortune-Tellers and Philosophers*, 233.

Visual perceptions are the best represented in this group. The emblematic term is *hou* 候 “to observe,” “to watch for.” Its use is mainly related to the observation of celestial and atmospheric omens (including some terrestrial events such as earthquakes). Equally present is the term *wang* 望 with a similar meaning but restricted to the observation of vapors (*qi* 氣) and clouds, when, for example, it is said of someone that he was able “to watch for the vapors (*wangqi* 望氣) and to predict the auspicious and the inauspicious by observing signs (*zhanhou*).”¹⁸ In another vein, we have the term *xiang* 相 “to examine,” “to analyze,” “to evaluate,” whose scope of application differs from the two preceding terms. Here, the intrinsic qualities (or defects) of a being or a thing are determined by examining its outer appearance, its physical traits and behavior, in the same way as a physician examines a patient to establish a diagnosis of his health condition. For example, the expression *xiang qi yinyang* 相其陰陽 means “to examine the yin and the yang of something or someone.” Relevant topics are places (*xiangbang* 相邦), residences (*xiangzhai* 相宅), animals, such as horses (*xiangma* 相馬) or dogs (*xianggou* 相狗), and above all humans (*xiangren* 相人). The latter term will remain in use in subsequent classifications to designate human physiognomy in general. Finally, there is the verb *jian* 見, “to see,” which is said of something that enters one’s vision unexpectedly, and the usage of the term is particularly salient in oneiromancy under the form *mengjian* 夢見 (to see in a dream).

Verbs with a cognitive function are gathered in the third group. Some of these verbs add a deductive dimension to the argument that leads the diviner to utter his prognostic: *tui yinyang* 推陰陽 “to extrapolate yin and yang” instead of *xiang yinyang* “to examine yin and yang”; *ming jixiong* 明吉凶 “to clarify the auspicious and the inauspicious” or *bian jixiong* 辨吉凶 “to distinguish between the auspicious and the inauspicious” instead of *zhan jixiong* 占吉凶 “to prognosticate the auspicious and the inauspicious.” Verbs that appear most often are almost synonyms: *shen* 審 “to investigate,” *cha* 察 “to inspect,” *kao* 考 “to test,” *xing* 省 “to evaluate.”¹⁹ They accompany or substitute terms from the two preceding groups, such as in parallel phrases of the following kind: “to inspect (*cha*) good omens and watch for (*hou*) stars and vapors” or “to interpret (*zhan*) turtle and milfoil signs and investigate (*shen*) the good or ill of hexagrams.”²⁰ Also representative in this group are those verbs that express the action of selecting (*ze* 擇) and counting (*shu* 數). In this context, the diviner selects (*ze*) the moment that is propitious for carrying out an

18 *Hou Han shu* 30B, “Lang Yi Xiang Kai liezhuan 朗顗襄楷列傳,” 1053.

19 For the use of these terms in astronomy, see Morgan, *Astral Sciences*, 47, table 1.5.

20 *Guice zhanzhao, shengua jixiong* 龜策占兆, 審卦吉凶 (*Lüshi chunqiu* 10.1, “Mengdong ji 孟冬紀,” 2a, 391). *Cha jixiang, hou xingqi* 察機祥, 候星氣 (*Shiji* 27, “Tianguan shu,” 1344).

activity by referring to a pre-established model. This can consist in a simple list of auspicious or inauspicious days, a complete calendar with annotations on day avoidances, or complex calculations (*shu*) involving schematic representations of time and space. The most employed term to qualify such practices is *zeri* 擇日, the art of “selecting days” or “hemerology.”²¹ The operation of selection generally implies enumeration, counting (*shu*). Hemerological collections discovered in tombs dating from the fourth to the first century BCE, of which some carry the title *Rishu* 日書 (Daybook), describe procedures in which the user is asked to find the day that suits him in a list, or to find the suitable time period by counting on a diagram: “Count from the case on the upper right side” (*cong shang youfang shu* 從上右方數), or “start counting from the first day of the month” (*cong shuori shishu* 從朔日始數).²²

This short survey of the three groups of terms that appear most frequently in texts before the end of the Han dynasty or shortly after in relation to the implementation of a divinatory procedure does not constitute a general typology of mantic arts. The threefold division adopted therein – divination by producing signs, by observing portents or examining symptoms, and by selecting or counting – neither takes into account the diversity of actions accomplished by the diviner between the time when he starts his work and the end of the procedure, nor does it take into account the social context in which divination was practiced, and the status of the practitioner – official, professional diviner, or simple individual. My intention here was primarily to facilitate access to the range of terms that will be taken up and developed in subsequent classifications. This led to unavoidable shortcuts and debatable groupings.

For example, milfoil divination is placed in the first group rather than in the third group because, on the one hand, it was seen – both in practice and in the texts mentioning it – as closely related to turtle divination, the same way as the examination of animal entrails (haruspicy) went together with the drawing of *sortes* in Roman divination. On the other hand, the verbal form *shu* “to count” is not part of the vocabulary used in relation with the casting of hexagrams. The *Changes* certainly give considerable prominence to numbers in their symbolic function – as in the famous formula in one of the canonical commentaries appended to the Classic since the Han: “Exhausting numbers (*shu*) to know the future, this is called ‘prognostication’ (*zhan*).”²³ It remains

21 For the use of the word “hemerology” in the Chinese context, see Harper and Kalinowski, eds., *Books of Fate*, 2–4.

22 Shuihudi manuscripts, “Daybook A,” slip 47 recto³; *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian*, 190. Zhoujia tai 周家臺 manuscripts, slip 132³; *Guanju Qin Han mu jiandu*, 120.

23 *Jishu zhilai zhi wei zhan* 極數知來之謂占 (*Zhouyi zhengyi* 7, “Xici A” 繫辭上, 13b). The famous saying recorded in the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, Xi 15, 365)

nevertheless that the casting technique exposed in the same commentary only resorts to action verbs such as “to separate in two” (*fen* 分), “to pile up” (*she* 揲), “to carry over the remains” (*guiqi* 歸奇), which all relate to operations performed by the diviner using milfoil stalks (*shi*) or counting rods (*ce*, *suan*). And the same applies to the drawing (*qu*) technique in the twelve pitch-standard divination listed in the first group, which probably involved the use of counting rods as well.²⁴

In order to avoid overloading unnecessarily the groupings, occurrences of general terms, such as *guanxiang* 觀象 “to observe (celestial) patterns,”²⁵ are set aside. The same holds for certain rare expressions, such as *bushi shiri* 卜筮視日 “to consult the turtle and milfoil and look at the days” in which the verb of perception *shi* 視 “to look at” indicates the act of consulting a list of days or a calendar in order to select a favorable day;²⁶ or as *xuanshi zhengqi* 旋式正棋 “to rotate the Shi and arrange the tokens,” which refers to the operation of the *shi* 式, a kind of mantic device used by hemerologists to calculate the propitious time to engage in an activity.²⁷ Finally, sibylline verses (*zhou* 繇), children ditties (*tongyao* 童謠), and prophecies (*chen* 讖) are not included either. Generally uttered *ex cathedra* in indirect discourses and without an established reference to a particular technique, they do fall outside the scope of the present chapter.²⁸

correlating turtle divination with “images” (*xiang*) and milfoil divination with “numbers” (*shu*), *gui xiang ye, shi shu ye* 龜象也, 筮數也, is another example of the prevalence of numbers in the sorting of hexagrams, which were originally written with digits from one to nine and not with solid (*yang*) and broken (*yin*) lines like in the received *Changes* (see above n12).

- 24 See Cheng, “Xiaoyi Qin Han jian,” 173. In ancient texts, the performance of milfoil divination is often correlated to that of turtle divination, for example: “The turtle expert holds the turtle, the milfoil expert arranges the rods” *buzhe caogui, shizhe duance* 卜者操龜, 筮者端策 (*Huainanzi jishi* 17, “Shuolin 說林,” 1178–79).
- 25 In the canonical commentaries to the *Changes*, the expression *guanxiang* is used both in the context of hexagram analysis (*shengua* 審卦 *guanxiang*) and in that of the observation of celestial phenomena (*guanxiang yu tian* 於天). In later dynasties, astronomical observatories were called “Terraces for observing celestial patterns” (*guanxiang tai* 臺); on the use of the term *guan* in astronomy, see Morgan, *Astral Sciences*, 91–92.
- 26 *Xunzi jijie* 19, “Lilun 禮論,” 377. Some excavated Western Han calendars are explicitly titled “Shiri” (Conspectus of days); see Cullen, “Calendars and Calendar Making,” 278.
- 27 *Shiji* 127, “Rizhe liezhuan 日者列傳,” 3218. On mantic devices of the *shi* type, see Kalinowski, “Les instruments astro-calendériques des Han”; and Kalinowski, “The Notion of ‘Shi.’”
- 28 For a comprehensive study of prophetic verses (*yao* 謠) in ancient China, see Kushida, *Chūgoku kodai*.

1.2 *Transmitted Texts*

Pre-Han and early Western Han sources are generally little prolix when it comes to the question of mantic arts. In the most ancient Classics, such as the *Documents* (*Shu* 書) and the *Odes* (*Shi* 詩), a few allusions can be found to divinatory practices, but these are always mentioned in passing and very laconically.

The techniques referred to are mainly turtle divination and to a lesser degree milfoil divination as well as, with a degree of uncertainty, the interpretation of dreams and divination on dwellings.²⁹ The situation hardly changes in the writings of the thinkers (*zhuzi* 諸子) from the Warring States and the early Han. Some of them, such as the *Mengzi* 孟子 (Mencius), even succeed in ignoring mantic arts entirely. Before the time of the skeptic philosopher Wang Chong 王充 (27–ca. 97) who wrote extensively on divination, references to mantic arts in the works of the thinkers are rare and leave no doubt about the authors' opinions.³⁰ Two points are worth noting. First, condemned techniques are more often than not limited to two main kinds: turtle and milfoil divination, and hemerology. For example, in a passage from the *Guanzi* 管子 (Master Guan) it is said that the one who possesses the Way “does not select days and months and however succeeds in all his deeds; he does not use turtle and milfoil and however gets a clear understanding of the auspicious and the inauspicious.”³¹ In a similar vein, the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (Master of Huainan) writes that the enlightened prince “neither selects seasons and days nor interprets hexagrams and turtle cracks.”³² These denials, included in widely varied discourses, are indicative of the influence exerted on people's minds by these two mantic techniques and their wide diffusion in society. Second, for the thinkers of that time, divination was an integral part of customary religion with its beliefs in supernatural powers, its cults and sacrifices: “When the ruler follows season and day avoidances, worships spirits and demons, gives

29 In the *Odes*, there are seven references to turtle divination (*bu*) and only two to milfoil divination (*shi*). In the *Documents* (excluding the specific case of the “Hongfan 洪範” [Great model] chapter; see below in this section), turtle divination is mentioned twenty-five times and milfoil divination two times. Dreams are also present (nine occurrences in the *Odes*, four in the *Documents*), but they usually don't give rise to an interpretation. As for occurrences of the word *xiang* (examine), it is hard to say if they are used in relation to divination, with the possible exception of expressions such as *xiangzhai* (to examine a dwelling) that occurs five times in the *Documents*.

30 For a translation of Wang Chong's writings on divination, see Kalinowski, *Destin, providence et divination*.

31 不日不月而事以從。不卜不筮而謹知吉凶 (*Guanzi jiaozhu* 38, “Baixin 白心,” 794).

32 *Shiyi buze shiri, buzhan guazhao* 是以不擇時日, 不占卦兆 (*Huainanzi jishi* 8, “Benjing xun 本經訓,” 556).

credit to turtle and milfoil, and indulges in sacrifices and cults, his state ought to perish.”³³ And even more bluntly: “For those who rely on spirits and demons, on seasons and days as well as on turtle and milfoil to mislead people, the sentence is death.”³⁴ Altogether, the entirety of ideas and practices deemed superstitious and disgraceful for a man of virtue is held up to opprobrium for the sake of morality and the respect of public order.

From the point of view that is relevant here, three documents deserve particular attention. The first is the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (Zuo chronicle) because it constitutes our main source of information on mantic activities before the Han. This work, compiled between the fourth and the second century BCE on the basis of existing annalistic traditions, is conceived as a commentary to the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Spring and autumn annals), a collection of annals from the State of Lu, which is traditionally attributed to Confucius and reports by means of short and lapidary notices the events that have occurred in Lu and elsewhere between 722 and 481, two years before the Master’s death.³⁵ Even if the *Zuo Chronicle* adopts the chronological framework set by the *Chunqiu* it nevertheless sets itself apart by historical material of incomparable wealth. Composed of accounts and legends articulated one to another, its narrative is characterized by a complex and relatively unified structure. By their sheer number and diversity, accounts of divination offer a sufficiently significant palette of practices from the Warring States. What’s more, historiographers, scholars and literati from the Han have never ceased to see in this the proof of the antiquity of these practices and to cite them in order to support their arguments for or against the legitimacy of mantic arts.

The *Zuo Chronicle* contains 132 accounts, anecdotes, or brief allusions in which various characters engage in divinatory activities. The different techniques used have been ranked according to their number of occurrences in table 4.1.³⁶

33 *Yong shiri, shi guishen, xin bushi er hao jisi zhe, kewang ye* 用時日，事鬼神，信卜筮而好祭祀者，可亡也 (*Hanfeizi jijie* 15, “Wangzheng 亡徵,” 109).

34 *Jia yu guishen, shiri, bushi yi yizhong, sha* 假於鬼神，時日，卜筮以疑眾，殺 (*Liji jishi* 5, “Wangzhi 王制,” 374).

35 For a presentation of the *Chunqiu* and its commentarial traditions including the *Zuo Chronicle*, see Cheng, *Étude sur le confucianisme Han*, 50–87 and 287–92; and Nylan, *The Five “Confucian” Classics*, 253–306.

36 Most of the *Zuozhuan* narratives are unrelated to entries in the *Chunqiu* sporadically recording failed turtle crack-making, eclipses, unusual conjunctions of stars, fires, floods, insect invasions, and other natural prodigies. For a detailed list of the narratives related to divination in the *Zuo Chronicle*, see Kalinowski, “Diviners and Astrologers,” 347, table 1.

TABLE 4.1 The mantic arts in the *Zuo Chronicle*, with the number of occurrences for each type of divination

Turtle divination	46
Milfoil divination	18
Dreams	26
Astrology	19
Omens and prodigies	15
Other	8

The first ranked techniques are turtle divination (forty-six occurrences) and milfoil divination (eighteen occurrences); these alone represent nearly half of the entire corpus. Predictions concern a vast range of preoccupations proper to the ruling elites and are in line with the context of a routine and ritualized practice. This applies specifically to turtle divination because of the number of its occurrences and the relative anonymity of the diviners, who are almost always referred to by the title of their function (*buren* 卜人, “turtle diviner”) and not by name. As for the method using milfoil stalks, it tends to extricate itself from the framework of official divination in order to be practiced independently by non-diviners, in general by scribes (*shi* 史) or members of the ruling elites. The diversification of uses of the *Changes* – divinatory as well as rhetorical and philosophical – accentuates the specificity of the treatment given to the Classic in the *Zuo Chronicle*.³⁷ This is in stark contrast with turtle divination for which not a single book title is mentioned.

Next are dreams with twenty-six occurrences. Whether premonitions or incentives, oneiric images are always related to the person having a dream and to events that affect him directly or indirectly. The interpretation of dreams, rather rare overall, is never done by mantic experts. It also occurs that a diviner or a scribe is solicited to elucidate the meaning of a dream by cracking a turtle shell or sorting milfoil stalks.

Astrological predictions (nineteen occurrences) are notable for being grouped under the last years of the reigns of the Dukes of Lu, notably of the duke Zhao 昭 (r. 541–510 BCE), who alone accounts for twelve occurrences. This makes one wonder if these occurrences do not constitute later additions.

37 See Kalinowski, “Diviners and Astrologers,” 349–59, and 358–59 for predictions by the *Changes* made without having recourse to the sorting of milfoil stalks (3 occurrences out of 18; see table 4.1).

Three types of phenomena are observed: eclipses, the risings and settings of the Fire Star (Dahuo 大火, Antares in Scorpio), and the twelve-year Jupiter cycle. Contrary to turtle and milfoil divination, the interpreters of these phenomena are clearly identified: most of them are well-known scribes-astrologers, whose prerogatives go well beyond the domain of mantic arts and extend to other sectors of public and private life. The same holds for interpreters of omens and prodigies (fifteen occurrences) who, in majority, are also scribes-astrologers.³⁸ Whether atmospheric disorders, strange behavior of animals, or physical anomalies and aberrations, the accounts that report on them are often accompanied by theoretical considerations upon the very nature of portents and their interpretation. Divinatory uses of the calendar are, however, poorly represented in the *Chronicle*. There are a few mentions of lucky or unlucky days and of seasonal avoidances, but hemerological practices very seldom give rise to narratives that include conflicting debates. Just as rare but nonetheless significant are stories involving predictions based on physiognomy.³⁹

The second document to consider is the *Zhouli* 周禮 (Rites of Zhou). This work of uncertain date but probably compiled towards the fourth century BCE is a detailed, though heavily idealized, description of the royal administration at the beginning of the Western Zhou (ca. 1045–771).⁴⁰ Among thousands of state functionaries, distributed over six ministries and in charge of the management of the affairs of the kingdom, specialists of mantic arts operate under the authority of the Ministry of Rites, which itself is composed of seventy major and minor officers, forming altogether a total of 3,673 functionaries and assimilated personnel. Alongside with the major officers who were in charge of rites and sacrifices, such as the Grand Master of Music (*Dayue* 大樂) and the Grand Invoker (*Dazhu* 大祝), are the offices of the Grand Diviner (*Dabu* 大卜) and the Grand Scribe (*Dashi* 大史). Three specialties are within the purview of the Grand Diviner: turtle divination, divination by the *Changes*, and the interpretation of dreams and portents (see table 4.2). His functions consisted in writing the proposals to be divined and presiding over the oracular consultations. He also played a role in royal sacrifices and cults, in ceremonies of enthronement and investiture, the moving of the capital, military campaigns,

38 On the growing influence of scribes-astrologers under the reigns of the last rulers of Lu as it is staged by the authors of the *Zuozhuan*, see Kalinowski, “Diviners and Astrologers,” 370–73 and table 4.2.

39 Among the eight occurrences listed in the bottom row of table 4.1 (“Other”), two are related to physiognomy, four are dealing with glyptomancy, and two with music divination; see Kalinowski, “Diviners and Astrologers,” 367–68.

40 On the dating and composition of the *Zhouli*, see Biot, *Le Tcheou-li*, “Introduction,” i–lxiv; and Loewe, *Early Chinese Texts*, 24–32.

TABLE 4.2 The staff of the Grand Diviner office in the Rites of Zhou

Office of the Grand Diviner	Officers/Aides	Techniques
Grand Diviners <i>Dabu</i> 大卜	2/48	Turtle divination,
Masters <i>Bushi</i> 卜師	4	divination by the <i>Changes</i> ,
Diviners <i>Buren</i> 卜人	24	dream divination.
Turtle officers <i>Guiren</i> 龜人	2/52	Turtle
Crack-making officers <i>Chui ren</i> 筮人	2/9	Turtle
Prognosticators <i>Zhan ren</i> 占人	8/11	Turtle and Milfoil
Milfoil officers <i>Shiren</i> 筮人	2/7	Milfoil
Dream prognosticators <i>Zhanmeng</i> 占夢	2/6	Dreams
Omen watchers <i>Shijin</i> 眡祲	2/6	Omens
Total	48/139	

and mortuary rites. Seven minor officers assisted him in these duties: four for turtle divination alone, including the one who made the prognostications, wrote them down, archived them, and at the end of the year kept an account of all predictions, whether they were accurate or not. The three others took care respectively of the sorting of milfoil stalks before the burning of the turtle plastron, of the interpretation and exorcism of dreams, and of the identification and conjuration of portents (*yaoxiang* 妖祥) that appeared in the realm.⁴¹

The Grand Scribe, for his part, was in charge of the production and storage of official documents and charts. It was also his duty to establish the calendar for the seasonal activities of the government and to assist the diviners in the choice of auspicious days for performing sacrifices. His predictive functions were carried out with the help of two minor officers, one in charge of astronomical observation and calendar calculations (*Fengxiang shi* 馮相氏, six officers and fourteen aides), the other of recording (*zhi* 志) celestial omens and atmospheric disorders (*Baozhang shi* 保章氏, also six officers and fourteen aides).⁴² Whatever degree of reality we may concede to this description of an ideal government established by the *Rites of Zhou*, the division of the mantic arts into two major offices – the office of the Grand Diviner for turtle

41 *Zhouli zhengyi* 32.1281–84, and 47–48.1924–84; Biot, *Tcheou-li*, 1:409–11 and 2:69–85; Raphals, *Divination and Prediction*, 88–90 and 125–26. In the central column of table 4.2, a distinction is made between the number of major officers (*dafu* 大夫 and *shi* 士) and that of their aides including scribes, storekeepers, and so forth.

42 *Zhouli zhengyi* 32.1286–90, and 51.2079–128; and Biot, *Le Tcheou-li*, 1:413–14 and 2:104–16.

and milfoil divination and the interpretation of dreams and portents on the one hand, and that of the Grand Scribe for astrology and meteoromancy on the other hand – will serve as a model for the distribution of tasks within the administrative organization of the empire. It will also be seen that this twofold division is not unrelated to the first classifications of the mantic arts developed by bibliographers and literati at the end of Western Han.

The last document to be considered is the “Hongfan 洪範” (Great model) chapter of the *Documents*, which played a decisive role in the ideological consolidation of the new empire, orchestrated by Confucian scholars after the reign of emperor Wu (r. 140–87 BCE).⁴³ This text, too, is an idealized political agenda in nine articles. Article five, in the central position, is dedicated to “Huangji 皇極” (Royal perfection). Therein one finds again the same bipartition of mantic arts as in the *Rites of Zhou*: on the one hand, article seven titled “Jiyi 稽疑” (Examination of doubts) deals with turtle and milfoil divination, and more specifically with the place devolved to diviners in making decisions about the governance of the empire, next to the ruler, his ministers and the people. On the other hand, article eight concerns celestial and atmospheric omens divided into good omens (*xiuzheng* 休徵) and bad omens (*jiuzheng* 咎徵). It should also be noted – and we will come back to this in the discussion of the classification in the bibliographic treatise of the *Book of Han* – that the observation of stars and calendar calculations are considered in a separate article, the fourth, with the title “Wuji 五紀” (The five regulators of time).

1.3 *Excavated Manuscripts*

The value of archaeological discoveries for the study of the production and transmission of mantic arts between the fourth and the first century is well established. A good deal of the relevant documents is still to be published – and some of them will never be, given the difficulties encountered with regard to the preservation of the writing surfaces used at that time (bamboo slips tight together to make bundles, bamboo and wooden tablets, silk sheets). Nevertheless, in half a century we have moved from an ocean of desolation to a land of milk and honey, a promised land where resources continue to grow through new discoveries and their exploitation by philologists and historians. The fact that a fair amount of the excavated manuscripts stems from clearly identified tombs provides the possibility to situate the texts related to mantic arts in the context of the written production available to the deceased. Leaving aside the question of the reasons for which manuscripts were placed

43 On the reception of the “Hongfan” chapter of the *Documents* under the Han, see Nylan, *The Shifting Center*, 45–61.

in tombs,⁴⁴ their varying number from one tomb to another and the diversity of their contents suggests that an organic link existed between the occupations and personal preferences of the deceased, and the writings intended to accompany them in their final home. In this regard, the case of Wangjiatai tomb 15, a tomb of modest size yet reasonably well supplied in manuscripts, is exemplary, since in addition to a legal text and a guide for the virtuous official, which indicate the implication of the deceased in local administration, three other texts are all related to mantic arts: the treatise on hexagram divination already mentioned (*Guicang*), an omen text written on more than one hundred bamboo slips, and a hemerological miscellany of the daybook text type (*rishu*).⁴⁵ Without going as far as saying that the occupant of the Wangjiatai tomb was an experienced diviner, it seems obvious that he had a strong interest in mantic arts.

For the present purpose, the most interesting tombs are those providing a significant amount of manuscripts that address different topics. Even if the excavated manuscripts represent probably only a sample of what was in the possession of the deceased during their lifetime, a classification of these documents according to textual genres allows to measure the place occupied by mantic arts within the body of knowledge that circulated in written form at a given time and social milieu. Two tombs shall serve as examples to illustrate this. Their occupants were members of provincial aristocracies and, above all, they lived during the early years of the Western Han, more than a century before scholars from the capital began to collect and collate books on behalf of the imperial household. The first one is Mawangdui 馬王堆 tomb 3 (burial dated to 168 BCE) discovered in 1973 at Changsha, Hunan. The deceased, named Li 利, was affiliated to the family that governed this region then situated on the southern edge of the empire. The manuscripts (silk sheets, bamboo and wooden slips) were neatly stored in a black lacquer box with a total of textual units estimated to more than forty.⁴⁶ The second tomb is Shuanggudui 雙古堆 tomb 1, discovered four years later, 600 kilometers north-east of Changsha, close to modern-day Fuyang (Anhui). Its occupant, Xiahou Zao 夏侯灶, carried the title of Lord of Ruyin 汝陰侯 at the time of his death in 165 BCE. Given the deplorable state in which the manuscripts (bamboo slips, wooden tablets)

44 For a recent overview of the debates surrounding this question, see Thote, "Daybooks in Archaeological Context," 39–47.

45 None of these texts has been fully published to date. For a presentation of the Wangjiatai manuscripts, see Wang, "Wangjiatai Qin mu zhujian gaishu."

46 Color photographs and transcriptions of the Mawangdui manuscripts are now fully accessible in *Changsha Mawangdui Han mu jianbo jicheng* published in 2014 (*Jicheng* thereafter). My estimation of the number of texts comprised in the collection is based on the list established in the introduction (*Jicheng*, 1:4–6).

have survived, it is difficult to evaluate the number of texts that were copied on them, even more so since the majority have not yet been published. Preliminary descriptions that have been made by specialists divide the texts into fifteen “textual groups.”⁴⁷ Besides the manuscripts, the Shuanggudui tomb also contained three astro-calendrical instruments, including two *shi*-type devices used for hemerological purposes.⁴⁸ In table 4.3 the texts and textual groups are classified by genre following the division between intellectual and technical writings established in the *Book of Han* bibliographic treatise.⁴⁹

TABLE 4.3 Manuscript collections from Mawangdui tomb 3 and Shuanggudui tomb 1

Text types	Mawangdui tomb 3	Shuanggudui tomb 1
Intellectual writings		
Classics	<i>Changes</i> , with 6 related philosophical texts	<i>Odes</i>
Historical records, chronologies	2 historical narratives	Historical narratives (<i>Shuolei zashi</i> 說類雜事), chronologies (<i>Dashi ji</i> 大事記, <i>Nianbiao</i> 年表)
Philosophical texts	<i>Laozi</i> 老子 (2 copies), and 8 philosophical texts (Warring States and early Han)	Philosophical texts (with parallels in <i>Zhuangzi</i> 莊子, <i>Lüshi chunqiu</i> , and Han Confucian miscellanea)
Technical writings		
Hemerology, calendrical astrology	6 texts ^a	Various texts on calendrical astrology, including a daybook (<i>Tianwen lizhan</i> 天文曆占)

a *Yinyang wuxing A* 陰陽五行甲篇, *Yinyang wuxing B* 陰陽五行乙篇, *Xingde A* 刑德甲篇 (text on the left), *Xingde B* 刑德乙篇 (text on the right), *Xingde C* 刑德丙篇, *Chuxing zhan* 出行占. For a study of the Xing-De (Punishment-virtue) texts, see Kalinowski, “The *Xingde* 刑德 Texts from Mawangdui,” 125–202.

47 In their detailed description of the Shuanggudui manuscripts (most of which remain unpublished), Hu and Li, *Changjiang liuyu*, distinguish fourteen “textual groups,” each group consisting of an undetermined number of independent texts dealing with the same subject.

48 On these devices, see n27 in this chapter.

49 For the Mawangdui manuscripts, the identification of texts is based on the classification established in *Jicheng*, 1:4–6. When required, the titles given by Hu and Li, *Changjiang liuyu*, to “textual groups” in the Shuanggudui manuscripts are indicated in parentheses in table 4.3.

TABLE 4.3 Manuscript collections from Mawangdui tomb 3 and Shuanggudui tomb 1 (*cont.*)

Text types	Mawangdui tomb 3	Shuanggudui tomb 1
Planetary predictions,	4 texts ^b	
Meteoromancy		
Physiognomy	1 text ^c	Dog physiognomy (<i>Xianggou</i> 相狗)
Medicine, body care,	15 texts ^d	<i>Materia medica</i> , uses of plants, animals, and objects (<i>Wanwu</i> 萬物)
plants, recipes		
Turtle and milfoil,	1 text ^e	Hexagram divination (<i>Changes</i>)
cleromancy		
Mathematics		Writing on reckoning (<i>Suanshu</i> <i>shu</i> 算術書)
Administrative texts		Regulations on housing, agri- culture, and artisans (<i>Zuowu</i> <i>yuancheng</i> 作物員程)
Educational material		Lexical primer (<i>Cang Jie pian</i> 蒼頡篇)
Other	Maps, charts, paintings	Astro-calendrical instruments

b *Wuxing zhan* 五星占, *Tianwen qixiang zazhan* 天文氣象雜占, *Xingde A* 刑德甲篇 (text on the right), *Xingde B* 刑德乙篇 (text on the left). On these texts, see Liu, *Mawangdui tianwen shu kaoshi*. For the *Tianwen qixiang zazhan*, see Loewe, *Divination, Mythology and Monarchy*, 61–84 (“The Han View of Comets”), and 191–213 (“The Oracles of the Clouds and the Winds”). On the *Wuxing zhan*, see Cullen, “Understanding the Planets,” 218–51.

c *Xiangma jing* 相馬經 (Classic on horse examination). This text is a literary composition on the external signs that define a good horse and does not belong *stricto sensu* to the domain of the mantic arts.

d The Mawangdui medical texts have been studied and fully translated by Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*.

e *Muren zhan* 木人占 (Prognostic of the Human Figurine). According to the editors of the *Jicheng* (5:161–68), this text describes a mantic method carried on by casting (*touzhi* 投擲) a human figurine on the ground and making predictions according to its position and orientation. On the upper right of the same manuscript there is a series of diagrams relating to another manuscript (not included in table 4.3) named by the editors “Zhaiwei zhaixing jixiong tu 宅位宅形吉凶圖” (Diagram showing the lucky and unlucky positions and conformations of dwellings). It is thus possible that the text written on the upper right of the *Muren zhan* manuscript is another example of popular topomantic methods such as those seen in daybooks (see n69 in this chapter).

Insofar as the present conditions for publication and transcription of the manuscripts allow, a comparison between the Mawangdui and Shuanggudui collections elicit the following observations. First, intellectual writings are present in both in a comparable ratio, although the texts from Mawangdui are more numerous and clearly organized along lines of major interests, as represented by the *Changes*, with six texts predating the canonical commentaries appended to the Classic in the Han; and the *Laozi*, with several texts associated with Huanglao 黃老 Daoism. Such doctrinal coherence seems less pronounced in Shuanggudui. Second, in Mawangdui the technical writings pertain to two main disciplines: the mantic arts (planetary predictions, meteoromancy, hemerology, and calendrical astrology) on the one hand;⁵⁰ medicine and body care on the other hand. In Shuanggudui, technical writings are more diversified. We have, for example, a version of the *Changes* for use in divination, which not only includes the sixty-four hexagrams and their associated oracles, but also for each hexagram a series of everyday life predictions classified by topics.⁵¹ The absence of texts on the observation of celestial and atmospheric omens is also noteworthy. As for the technical texts that do not belong to the category of mantic arts (a text on reckoning, an administrative text, and a lexical primer), they are without parallel in Mawangdui. In this respect, the content of the Shuanggudui tomb appears to be closer to what is usually found in tombs of Qin and Han local officials, rather than to Mawangdui tomb 3. Third, the respective specificities of the collections excavated from these two tombs are certainly not unrelated to the status and wealth of its occupants. Yet, the exceptional richness of the Mawangdui grave and the fact that the texts were written on pieces of silk – an extravagant material at that time – and not on bamboo slips, as it is the case for nearly all manuscripts discovered to date, does not explain everything.

Another aspect resulting from the comparison of the two collections is indeed the practical, functional dimension of the technical writings from Shuanggudui. Why would one include an administrative text about the

50 The term “calendrical astrology” translates *shizhan* 式占 (*shi*-divination) used in modern scholarship to designate all types of calendar-based astrology. The term becomes commonly attested to in medieval times, when it appears in connection with the so-called “Three Model” (*sanshi* 三式) calendrical astrology. In the Qin and Han excavated texts, the boundaries distinguishing calendrical astrology from hemerology in general remain unclear and poorly understood. On the defining features of calendrical astrology, see Kalinowski, “The Notion of ‘Shi,’” 336; and on Three-Model calendrical astrology, see Ho, *Chinese Mathematical Astrology*.

51 For an English translation of the Shuanggudui manuscript of the *Changes*, see Shaughnessy, *Unearthing*, 189–279.

regulation of construction works and the control of the activity of artisans if there was no relation to the activity of Xiahou Zao during his lifetime? It is also possible that some parts in the textual group related to calendrical astrology are connected to the operation of the *shi*-type mantic devices found in the tomb.⁵² In this respect, manuscripts from Shuanggudui bear witness to a practical dimension, which brings them closer to those from Wangjiatai introduced earlier. The collection from Mawangdui is less susceptible for allowing to make such a connection, not only because of the number of writings of which it is composed and their high degree of specialization, but also for the quality of the manuscripts themselves. What we are facing is a kind of “scholarly collection” that has belonged to a man of great erudition, versed in the study of the trends of thought of his time, with a strong preference for Daoism, but also for medicine and the arts of longevity, the philosophy of *Changes*, meteoromancy, and hemerology. The Mawangdui manuscripts show that the provincial elites from the second century BCE collected, copied or had copies made of writings for their own use or for reasons of prestige. These writings covered a wide range of intellectual and technical knowledge representative of the manuscript culture of the time.

Lastly, and as a preamble to the following part on classifications in the *Book of Han* bibliographic treatise, it might be helpful to draw up a brief inventory of the documents that relate to mantic arts in the excavated manuscripts.⁵³ This also provides an opportunity to embody the threefold division established above. For divination by production of signs, there is a clear dominance of texts related to turtle and milfoil divination. In continuity with Shang and Zhou oracle-bone inscriptions, we have the divination and sacrifice records (*bushi qidao jilu* 卜筮祈禱記錄) on bamboo slips originating from fourth century BCE tombs. These records attest to turtle and milfoil divination carried out by professional diviners for the nobles of the Chu kingdom shortly before their death owing to illness.⁵⁴ As for texts, again for the fourth century BCE, we have a fragmentary treatise on oracle bone divination and an incomplete version of the *Changes*, both stored in the Shanghai Museum,⁵⁵

52 See Hu and Li, *Changjiang liuyu*, 528–29.

53 For an annotated transcription of these documents, see Liu, *Jianbo shushu*.

54 A dozen of such collections of divination and sacrifice records have been discovered to date, the most famous being the collection found in Baoshan 包山 tomb 2, Hubei, dated to 316 BCE; see Li, “Formulaic Structure.” The Baoshan records are translated in Cook, *Death in Ancient China*, 153–264.

55 *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu*, 9:289–302 (for the text on turtle divination named “Bushu 卜書” by the editors of the manuscripts); and 3:31–260 (for the

as well as an illustrated manual on the use and symbolism of the eight trigrams and the sixty-four hexagrams kept by Qinghua University in Beijing.⁵⁶ For the Qin period (ca. 250 BCE), we have the *Guicang* from Wangjiatai already mentioned and, for the Western Han, there are now three versions of the *Changes* at our disposal: the one from Mawangdui for which a divinatory use is not established, the one from Shuanggudui (see above), and a new version from the tomb of the Lord of Haihun 海昏侯 buried in Nanchang, Jiangxi, in the second half of the first century BCE. According to the preliminary excavation report, the Nanchang manuscript does not constitute a formal edition of the Classic, it is rather a miscellany combining the sixty-four hexagrams to hemerological annotations.⁵⁷ In addition to these writings linked to the tradition of the *Changes*, we have the twelve pitch-standard divination from Fangmatan, which, as seen above, relies upon the technique of drawing (*qu*), and the “Jingjue 荆决” (Prognostic from Jing), one of the Han dynasty manuscripts owned by Beijing University. The method described in this manuscript is a simplified form of divination by the hexagrams of the *Changes*. The user holds the manual in his left hand while, using his right hand, he proceeds with the sorting of a mantic pattern using a set of thirty counting rods (*zuoshou chishu, youshou caosuan* 左手持書, 右手操筭).⁵⁸

For divination by observation or examination of existing signs, three subgroups can be distinguished. These are, first, meteoromantic texts, mainly those from Mawangdui already mentioned. Han manuscripts from Beijing University also contain a text on predictions based on rain and winds which carries the title “Yushu 雨書” (Rainbook).⁵⁹ A second subgroup consists of more hybrid writings due to the nature of observed signs, which are not limited to celestial and atmospheric phenomena. This is the case for several yin-yang texts from Yinqueshan 銀雀山 tomb 1, Shandong (burial dated to the

Changes). The manuscript of the *Changes* is studied and translated in Shaughnessy, *Unearthing*, 37–139.

56 For a translation of this manual, named “Shifa 筮法” by the editors of the manuscripts, see Cook and Lu, *Stalk Divination*.

57 The manuscript awaits formal publication. For a presentation of the tomb and its content, see Yang and Xu, “Nanchang shi Xi Han,” 61.

58 See *Beijing daxue cang Xi Han zhushu*, 5:145–77. On cleromantic techniques using dices and counting rods, see Lewis, “Dicing and Divination”; and the forthcoming study by Bréard, “Games.”

59 See *Beijing daxue cang Xi Han zhushu*, 5:45–86. Texts on meteoromantic predictions are also found in the Yinqueshan manuscripts (*Yinqueshan Han mu zhujian*, 2:241–46) and in the Qin and Han daybooks (see Harper and Kalinowski, *Books of Fate*, 197, 446, 455 and 459).

second century BCE), and for the omen text from Wangjiatai.⁶⁰ The latter is composed of a list of natural catastrophes and physical aberrations such as an earthquake, a horse giving birth to a bull, a stillborn tree, a man or stones that fall from the sky. Just as interesting are the bamboo slips discovered in the ruins of the Weiyang Palace 未央宮 in Chang'an (near modern Xi'an; end of the first century BCE). The text is made up of notes written by a specialist in the observation of auspicious signs (*rui* 瑞) and prodigies.⁶¹ Finally, it is worth mentioning the exceptional presence of a key to dreams among the manuscripts stored at Hunan University in Changsha (Yuelu Academy 嶽麓書院).⁶² The third subgroup includes writings that are concerned with examination techniques (*xiangshu* 相術). In addition to the two texts from the Mawangdui and Shuanggudui tombs (see table 4.3), we have fragments of a dog examination treatise among the manuscripts from Yinqueshan.⁶³ Dwelling examination (*xiangzhai*) is little documented, except in several sections of the daybooks, which contain unprecedented information on topomantic techniques used under the Qin and the Han. The disposition of doors in the surrounding wall of a dwelling and the shape and orientation of its constituent parts were all given special attention.⁶⁴

For divination by selection and calculation, it is the entirety of texts related to the calendar that needs to be considered, starting from the calendars themselves. We have seen that some of them contained hemerological annotations since the early second century BCE. The manuscripts from Yinqueshan also contain such annotations in texts related to the tradition of "monthly ordinances" (*yueling* 月令) and "seasonal ordinances" (*shiling* 時令).⁶⁵ The most relevant documents in this group are, on the one hand, treatises on hemerology and calendrical astrology from Mawangdui (see table 4.3) describing complex systems in which predictions are made through calculations based on the periodic movement of calendar spirits (*shensha* 神煞) on schematic

60 *Yinqueshan Han mu zhujian*, 2:230–46. On the omen text from Wangjiatai titled "Zaiyi zhan 災異占" by the editors of the manuscripts, see Wang, "Wangjiatai Qin mu zhujian gaishu," 47–48.

61 See Kalinowski, "Divination and Astrology," 345; and Xing, "Han Weiyang gong qian dian yizhi."

62 *Yuelu shuyuan cang Qin jian*, 1:150–73.

63 *Yinqueshan Han mu zhujian*, 2:253–54.

64 See Kalinowski, "Hemerology and Prediction," 148, 150, 179 figure 4.9, and 189–90; see also n54 in this chapter.

65 *Yinqueshan Han mu zhujian*, 2:211–28. On the "monthly ordinances" and "seasonal ordinances" writings in relation to hemerology and to the Zidanku 子彈庫 silk manuscripts (ca. 300 BCE), see Li, "The Zidanku Silk Manuscripts," 270 and 272.

representations of time and space.⁶⁶ These systems prefigure in many ways the so-called “Three Model” (*sanshi* 三式) calendrical astrology, which took its definite shape at the end of the medieval period.⁶⁷ On the other hand are the daybooks: the number of currently available copies varies between ten and twenty depending on the more or less narrow definition of the term *rishu* given by specialists.⁶⁸ These documents show similar contents even if they often differ in size and composition. For example, one of the two daybooks excavated in 1976 in Shuihudi 睡虎地 tomb 11, at Yunmeng, Hubei (burial dated to 217 BCE) may be divided into sixty different sections inscribed on the two sides of the manuscript composed of 166 bamboo slips. In addition to the purely hemerological part that represents around 75% of the whole manuscript, this daybook also contains magic recipes, propitiatory rites, and exorcisms (15%), two sections on topomancy (5%), and several theoretical sections (5%).⁶⁹ Daybooks constitute documents of an inestimable value for the study of hemerology during the Warring States, Qin, and Han periods. Furthermore, they abound in concrete information that allows to situate hemerological ideas and practices in the context of everyday life of those (for a large part members of the local or provincial administration) who owned and used them.

Such was the situation of mantic arts before the reorganization of the imperial collections, which led at the end of the first century BCE to the compilation of the bibliographic treatise of the *Book of Han*. In summary, for divination by production of signs, we have turtle divination or oracle-bone divination, milfoil divination or divination by the *Changes*, and other cleromantic techniques based on dice or counting rods; for divination by observation or examination of existing signs, we have meteoromancy, omenology, oneiromancy, and physiognomy; and for divination by selection and calculation, hemerology and calendrical astrology.

66 This definition applies to the Xing-De (Punishment-virtue) system (see Kalinowski, “The *Xingde* 刑德 Texts from Mawangdui”), as well as to the Tianyi 天一 (Heaven One) and Kanyu 堪輿 (Canopy-and-chassis) systems (see *Jicheng*, 5:93–98 for the Kanyu texts; 68–69 and 140–42 for the Tianyi texts). The Kanyu system is also attested in the Western Han manuscripts owned by Beijing University (*Beijing daxue cang Xi Han zhushu*, 5:87–143).

67 See n55 in this chapter.

68 For a presentation of the daybooks published to date, see Liu, “Daybooks,” 66–74.

69 On the content and composition of the first daybook from Shuihudi (Daybook A), see Kalinowski, “Les livres des jours.”

2 The Bibliographic Treatise of the *Book of Han*

The scholars who in 32 BCE undertook the collation and edition of writings from the pre-Han and early Western Han were far from measuring the impact their classifications would have on future generations. Responding to an imperial ordinance, their main focus was on the consolidation of the existing power structure and the reevaluation of the scriptural heritage from the previous centuries with respect to the cultural imperatives of the time and their own ideological assumptions.⁷⁰ They felt that this heritage had been corrupted due to the decadence of the Zhou between the beginning of the first millennium BCE and the Spring and Autumn period (770–476 BCE), the proliferation of writings of all sorts under the Warring States, and, finally, because of the devastating effect of unification wars which lead to the foundation of the Qin (221–207 BCE) and Han empires. Change began to be tangible under the reign of emperor Wu (r. 140–87 BCE) credited by historiographers for having been the first to design a project of reevaluation of the existing written traditions and for having recruited specialized officials for the production of manuscripts. Thus, the imperial storehouses progressively came to abound in written works of any kind, inside the palace in collections with limited access, and outside the palace in storerooms of different ministries or in private collections.⁷¹

In this context of uncontrolled accumulation of writings of all genres and origins, emperor Cheng (r. 32–7) took the initiative, during the months following his enthronement, to put in order the manuscript collections, which were scattered across the libraries of the capital, and to constitute a collection of eruditely selected books, edited under the best possible auspices. While a certain Chen Nong 陳農 was sent to the provinces to collect missing texts, it was the eminent scholar, doxographer, and bibliographer Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE) who was in charge of bringing the project to its completion.⁷² While working on the collation and edition of manuscripts estimated to several tens of thousands, he wrote an editorial record for each examined work. It is precisely

70 On the ideological and cultural background of the compilation of the *Book of Han* bibliographic treatise, see Lewis, *Writing and Authority*, 325–32; Kalinowski, *Divination et société*, 12–13; Raphals, “Divination in the *Hanshu*,” 98–101; and Lee, *Intellectual Activism*, 123–51.

71 *Hanshu* 30.1701. On the book repositories at the Western Han capital; see Drège, *Les bibliothèques*, 19; Fölster, “The Imperial Collection,” 99–107, 294; and Lee, *Intellectual Activism*, 37–43.

72 *Hanshu* 10.310. On the work accomplished by Liu Xiang and its collaborators, see Fölster, “The Imperial Collection,” 125–39.

these records that, joined one to another, form the core of his now lost *Bielu* 別錄 (Detached records).⁷³ After his death, his son Liu Xin 劉歆 (50 BCE–23 CE), himself an important scholar and a high ranking politician, pursued the work his father had left unfinished and in turn wrote the *Qilüe* 七略 (Seven summaries). He thereby bequeathed to posterity the first analytical catalog of an imperial library and the first attempt at a systematic classification of pre-Han and Western Han writings.⁷⁴

Of this work, presented by Liu Xin to the emperor between 8 and 6 BCE, only excerpts recorded in medieval texts would have remained, if the historian Ban Gu (32–92) had not included an abbreviated version of Liu Xin's catalog in the *Book of Han* under the title "Yiwen zhi." Modern scholarship agrees that the *Book of Han* bibliographic treatise is a faithful yet amended reproduction of the *Seven summaries*. Ban Gu has followed without any significant change the inner organization of the work in six "summaries," which represent the six textual divisions and their thirty-eight subdivisions as they have been established by Liu Xiang and Liu Xin, leaving aside the first summary, which outlined the editorial principles underlying the production of the book collection.⁷⁵

The collation and the edition of doctrinal, intellectual, and literary writings included in the first three divisions of the treatise were carried out by Liu Xiang himself: "Liuyi 六藝" (Six arts, i.e. the Classics, with the *Changes* in the first subdivision and Confucius's *Analects* in the seventh of nine subdivisions), "Zhuzi 諸子" (Masters, i.e. the intellectual works, beginning with the Confucians), and "Shifu 詩賦" (Songs and verse). Other court officials were entrusted with the last three divisions dealing with technical literature: Ren Hong 任宏, from the military office, for "Bingshu 兵書" (Military writings); Yin Xian 尹咸, from the office of the Grand Scribe 太史 (in charge of astrology and calendar making), for "Shushu 數術" (Numbers and techniques); and Li Zhuguo 李柱國,

73 On Liu Xiang's editorial records and the composition of the *Bielu*, see Fölster, "The Imperial Collection," 9–17. Fölster (ibid., 71) notes that evidence provided by the editorial records show that the editors had between 65,000 and 100,000 textual units at their disposal before starting their work, an amount five to ten times superior than the 13,269 units mentioned in the *Book of Han* bibliographic treatise for the whole collection after it was completed (see table 4.4).

74 See Fölster, "The Imperial Collection," 17–37, for the dating and composition of the *Qilüe*; and 238–97 for a translation of the *Qilüe* and *Bielu* fragments preserved in the received literature until the twelfth century.

75 *Hanshu* 30.1701–84. For recent studies of the *Book of Han* bibliographic treatise, see Raphals, "Divination in the *Hanshu*"; Li, *Lantai wanjuan*; Lee, *Intellectual Activism*, 43–121; and Fölster, "The Imperial Collection," 37–66 and 298–400.

from the medical bureau, for “Fangji 方技” (Recipes and skills) (medicine, sexual practices, and inner cultivation).⁷⁶

The composition of the treatise is uniform. All divisions are complemented by a postscript, and all comprise subdivisions, to which again short postscripts are added. For each subdivision, we find a series of book titles with the number of “bundles” (*juan* 卷) or “texts” (*pian* 篇) they are composed of. Table 4.4 gives an overview of the composition of the treatise. The three columns to the right reproduce statistical data on the number of entries (*jia* 家), texts (*pian*), and bundles (*juan*) contained in each division, as provided in the postscripts. The last line of the table shows the global estimation as specified at the end of the treatise.⁷⁷

TABLE 4.4 The composition of the *Book of Han* bibliographic treatise, with the number of entries (*jia*), texts (*pian*), and bundles (*juan*) in each division

Divisions	Subdivisions	<i>jia</i>	<i>pian</i>	<i>juan</i>
Six arts	9	103	3123	
Masters	10	189	4324	
Songs and verse	5	106	1318	
Military writings	4	53	790	(43) ^a
Numbers and techniques	6	109		2528
Recipes and skills	4	36		868
Total estimation	38	596		13269

a The amount of forty-three *juan* given in the preface (*Hanshu* 30.1762) does not correspond to written texts but to diagrams (*tu* 圖) whose origin is not specified. Moreover, as noted by Fölster (“The Imperial Collection,” 99), this amount is incorrect.

76 *Hanshu* 30.1701; see Fölster, “The Imperial Collection,” 346, for a translation of the relevant passage. On Yin Xian (fl. 26 BCE–5 CE) who was in charge of the “Numbers and techniques” division, see *Hanshu* 19B.856; and 36. 1967.

77 *Hanshu* 30.1781. This global estimation does not differentiate between *juan* and *pian*. Moreover, the amount 13,269 does not correspond to the number of book titles actually listed in the treatise. For example, according to Li Ling’s count the treatise includes 600 *jia* and 12,983 *juan*, whereas Fölster counts 621 entries and 12,983 (+8) *juan/pian*; see Li, *Lantai wanjuan*, 221; and Fölster, “The Imperial Collection,” 90 and 98.

The inconsistency of statistical data given in the treatise has been noticed for a long time, but none of the hitherto suggested solutions to reconcile the diverging figures is genuinely satisfactory.⁷⁸ For the present purpose, it should be noted that the works classified under the two ultimate divisions, including the “Numbers and techniques” division under which falls the majority of writings on mantic arts, differ from the four first division in two important ways. On the one hand, they are, with a few exceptions, the only ones that are counted mainly in units of bundles (*juan*) and not in number of texts (*pian*).⁷⁹ Since some entries in the “Six arts” division indicate both the number of bundles and texts, and because the number of texts is always greater than the number of bundles, we can assume that in this context the *juan* already represents, as it will be the case afterwards, a codicological unit (a manuscript, a slip bundle, a scroll) and the *pian*, a textual unit (a text, a chapter).⁸⁰ On the other hand, although the works classified in the first four divisions are often accompanied by additional notes, which give details on their presumed authors, their provenance and date, such notes are entirely absent from the last two divisions.⁸¹ The phenomenon is difficult to explain, but these two characteristics peculiar to the “Numbers and techniques” and “Recipes and skills” divisions, combined with the fact that they have been supervised respectively by the office of the Grand Scribe and the bureau for medicine, give them a special status in the treatise as a whole: either the writings contained in these two divisions did not lend themselves to an enumeration expressed in terms of clearly delimited textual units, or they were not given as much attention as Liu Xiang and Liu Xin had paid to the edition of the Classics and the intellectual and literary writings.

78 See the discussion in Fölster, “The Imperial Collection,” 96–99.

79 The amounts given in the postscripts are approximate because it happens that within a division mainly counted in *juan* some book titles are counted in *pian*; and conversely. For example, the “Numbers and techniques” division is actually composed of 110 book titles for a total amount of 2,479 *juan* and 71 *pian* (see table 4.5). Nonetheless, the contrast between the first four divisions mainly counted in *pian* and the two last ones in *juan* remains a matter of debate. For a discussion, see Drège, *Les bibliothèques*, 106; Li, *Lantai wanjuan*, 10; Kalinowski, “La production des manuscrits,” 133n4; and Fölster, “The Imperial Collection,” 89–96.

80 See the discussion of these entries in Fölster, “The Imperial Collection,” 90–91.

81 There is a debate concerning the authorship of the additional notes, some scholars claiming that at least some of them were written by Liu Xin or one of his colleagues and not, as it is generally believed, added by Ban Gu at the time he was editing the *Book of Han* bibliographic treatise; see the discussion in Fölster, “The Imperial Collection,” 41–52.

Mantic arts are present in the treatise in several respects. First, they are to be found indirectly in the third of the ten subdivisions, namely among cosmologists (*yinyang jia* 陰陽家, “Yin-Yang experts”) in the “Masters” division, directly following Confucians (*rujia* 儒家) and Daoists (*daoia* 道家). Twenty-one book titles, representing a total of 368 *pian*, are listed, virtually all by the name of their presumed “authors.” Some of them are known for their expertise in the domain of astral sciences, such as Zi Wei 子偉 (fl. 515–450 BCE); in harmonics and calendar making as is the case for Zhang Cang 張蒼 (d. 151 BCE); or in the prediction of dynastic changes based on the observation of portents, as, for example, Zou Yan 鄒衍 (fl. 305–240 BCE). Other authors are mythical figures, such as Huangdi 黃帝, the Yellow Emperor, or unknown illustrious personalities of whom we know nothing except that most of them worked at the courts of the Warring States period. The postscript by Liu Xin traces the origin of this strand of thought back to the first observers of heaven, mandated by the civilizing sovereigns of the *Classic of Documents* to landscape the world. He thus assigned a central role to celestial patterns and calendar cycles in governing men and society – a point of view carried on and accentuated by Han scholars and ideologists.⁸² At the same time, yet here on an overtly depreciative tone, the postscript deplores that certain Yin-Yang experts “abide in prohibitions and avoidances, indulge in minor calculations and, neglecting human affairs, rely on spirits and demons.”⁸³ Such rhetoric of exclusion can be understood as an indication that the practices deemed to be heterodox by the author of the postscript are precisely those related to the mantic arts. Although the book titles alone do not allow to know their actual content, the fact that they have been subsumed under the “Masters” division shows the strong interaction which existed at the time between the politico-moral speculations of the cosmologists and the divinatory techniques classified in the “Shushu” division.⁸⁴

82 This refers to the famous legend in the “Yaodian 堯典” (Canon of Yao) chapter of the *Documents* which recounts how the mythical ruler Yao 堯 sent the Xi 羲 and He 和 brothers to the four quarters of the world to regulate the course of the seasons by observing culminating stars at the solstices and the equinoxes. The epic of Xi and He is the foundation narrative of Chinese astral sciences.

83 *Hanshu* 30.1734–35. The expression *xiaoshu* 小數 (minor calculations or minor arts), which is also found in the postscript to the “Five agents” subdivision of the “Numbers and techniques” division (ibid., 1769), refers here to the divinatory uses of calendrical calculations.

84 An interaction already clearly seen in the classification of Warring States and early Han intellectual lineages established by Sima Tan 司馬談 (d. ca. 110 BCE), in which the yin-yang techniques (*yinyang shu* 陰陽術) are listed first, followed by the Confucians (*ru zhe*), the Mohists (*mozhe*), the legalists (*fajia*), the nominalists (*mingjia*), and the Daoists (*dao-jia*); *Shiji* 130, “Taishi gong zixu 太史公自序,” 3188–89.

It is noteworthy that in later classifications the term *yinyang* will be used to qualify mantic arts in general, and the diviners are often named “Yin-Yang masters” (*yinyang shi* 陰陽師) in texts from the Eastern Han (25–220 CE) on.

Second, the division “Military writings,” too, contains a subdivision titled “Yin-Yang.” The book titles in this subdivision are directly related to divination as shown in the postscript, which describes the tasks that are assigned to the diviners in the following way: “They are those who set out armies in compliance with the seasons, extrapolate the positions of Punishment and Virtue, proceed in accordance with the direction struck by the Northern Dipper (*Ursa Major*), rely on the conquest cycle of the five agents, and call on spirits and demons for assistance.”⁸⁵ Judging by the titles of the sixteen books (in 227 *pian* and ten *juan* of diagrams) classified within this subdivision, the methods that were used in a military context are related either to the field of meteoromancy or to that of hemerology. Most books are paralleled in the “Numbers and techniques” division and owe their presence here only to their military applications.⁸⁶ The manuscripts from Mawangdui and Yinqueshan contain several texts of this kind. They provide some good insight into the relevant methods and the way in which diviners formulated their prognostics about the imminence of a conflict, the outcome of a battle, the moral of the troops, and so forth.⁸⁷

Third, the part of the treatise dedicated primarily to the mantic arts is the “Shushu” (Numbers and techniques) division. This division constitutes the beginning of a long tradition and the key reference for all classifications of the mantic arts established afterwards by bibliographers and historians.⁸⁸ The term *shushu* is hardly translatable into any modern language. Several translations have been proposed, as for example “calculation techniques.” The current tendency adopted here is to translate each component separately, “numbers” (*shu* 數) and “techniques” (*shu* 術), just as the title of the sixth division (“Fangji”) is usually translated as “Recipes and skills.”

85 *Hanshu* 30.1760. The use of these methods in military divination is borne out by a similar passage in the “Binglüe 兵略” (Essentials of warfare) chapter of the *Master of Huainan*: “He who is clear about the mysteries of even and odd, about the alternating cycles of Punishment and Virtue and of the five agents, about watching for the vapors and gazing at the stars, about turtle and milfoil divination and the interpretation of portentous signs: such a person is skillful at practicing the Way of Heaven” (*Huainanzi jishi* 15.1094–95).

86 For an identification of the book titles listed in this subdivision, see Li, *Lantai wanjuan*, 159–63.

87 See Hu, *Zhongguo zaoqi fangshu*, 220–52; Yates, “The History of Military Divination”; and Yates, “The Yin-Yang Texts from Yinqueshan.”

88 For recent surveys of the content of the “Shushu” division, see Raphals, “Divination in the *Hanshu*,” 81–92; and Liu, “Daybooks,” 85–87.

While in classifications from the end of the imperial period, the term *shushu* becomes a quasi-synonym for divination (in its inverted form “Techniques and numbers”), its meaning in the *Book of Han* bibliographic treatise goes well beyond the boundaries of mantic arts. In this context, the notion of *shu* “number” plays a central role, it reflects the Pythagorean idea that all things in this world possess a “number,” a numeric norm, which permits to distinguish them from one another, while ensuring their cohesion within a spatial and temporal hierarchy. One of the Qin manuscripts, acquired in 2012 by Beijing University, records a brilliant exchange between an apprentice of mathematics and his master, who, in response to questions asked by his disciple, maintains from the outset the superiority of the art of calculation (*jishu* 計數) over the study of discursive knowledge (*duyu* 讀語): “Give up on discourse and go into numbers in depth.... Among the things in this world, there is none that is not based on numbers.”⁸⁹ The meaning of the term *shushu* may then be understood as applying to all systematic processes that investigate nature and things, and seen in opposition to *xueshu* 學術 (literally: “techniques of learning”), which represents the intellectual traditions included in the divisions of the treatise devoted to canonical texts and the writings of the masters of thought.⁹⁰

Here is the postscript of the “Numbers and techniques” division:

“Numbers and techniques” were all in the hands of the Xi and He, the scribes, and the diviners of the Bright Hall. The office of the scribes has long been abolished, their writings cannot be well provided anymore, and even if one had them the proper men are not present. The *Changes* says: “Had there not been the right people, the Way would not have been practiced in vain.”⁹¹ During the Spring and Autumn period there was Zi Shen in Lu, Pi Zao in Zheng, Diviner Yan in Jin, and Zi Wei in Song; during the period of the Six States there were Sire Gan in Chu and Master Shi Shen in Wei; in Han times there was Tang Du. They all had obtained a rough understanding of these (early achievements). It is indeed easier to accomplish something when there is something to rely on than to accomplish something when there is nothing to rely on. Therefore, I have relied on ancient writings in order to arrange “Numbers and techniques” into six categories.⁹²

89 *She yu er che shu ... tianxia zhi wu wu bu yong shu zhe* 舍語而徹數 ... 天下之物無不用數者 (Han, “Beida cang Qin jian,” 30).

90 See Li, *Jianbo gushu*, 11–15 and 208.

91 *Zhouyi zhengyi* 8 (“Xici B 繫辭下”), 19b.

92 *Hanshu* 30.1775. Translation follows Fölster, “The Imperial Collection,” 394–95, with modifications.

數術者，皆明堂義和史卜之職也。史官之廢久矣，其書既不能具，雖有其書而無其人。易曰：「苟非其人，道不虛行。」春秋時魯有梓慎，鄭有裨灶，晉有卜偃，宋有子韋。六國時楚有甘公，魏有石申夫。漢有唐都，庶得羈輅。蓋有因而成易，無因而成難，故因舊書以序數術為六種。

To begin with, the author traces the origin of *shushu* ideas and practices back to the activity of astrologers, scribes, and diviners from the glorious era of the legendary rulers, similar to what we have seen for Yin-Yang experts.⁹³ Then, after having pointed out that the writings of these remote times have basically all disappeared, he moves on to the subsequent periods with a list of seven individuals praised by historiographers for their knowledge in the field of astral sciences and divination, and credited for having been able to collect the essentials of the scribal heritage from the past. Finally, coming to the period of his lifetime, the author claims to have organized the “Shushu” division of the catalog in six categories by relying upon “ancient writings” (*jiushu* 舊書).

The precedence granted in the postscript to astro-calendrical traditions comes without surprise since the collation and edition of writings from the “Shushu” division were confined to Yin Xian who headed the office of the Grand Scribe (*Taishi ling* 太史令) and was in charge – as we have seen with respect to the *Rites of Zhou* – of astrology and calendar making. The fact that Liu Xin himself was versed in the field of astral sciences also needs to be taken into account. He occupied the position of head of the office of the Grand Scribe and we owe him the conception of the “Triple Concordance” astronomical system (*Santong li* 三統曆) in force from 7 BCE to 45 CE.⁹⁴ What’s more, the rise in power of scribe-astrologers to the detriment of diviners using tortoise shells and milfoil stalks is a well-represented topos in the accounts of divination recorded in the *Zuo Chronicle*.⁹⁵ In other words, Liu Xiang and Liu Xin merely conformed a situation that pre-existed since at least the fourth century BCE.

A second noteworthy point is that, among the seven figures quoted in the postscript, only Gan De 甘德 (ca. third century BCE) is among the presumed authors of a work classified under the “Shushu” division, while the writings of the astrologer Zi Wei are placed in the “Yin-Yang experts” subdivision of the

93 See n88 in this chapter.

94 Liu Xin held this position after 1 CE, the year when the office of the Grand Scribe was changed into Xi-He office 羲和之官 by emperor Ping (r. 1–5 CE) in reference to the star-watchers at the time of the mythical ruler Yao; see *Hanshu* 12.351; and 36, 1972. On the *Santong li*, see Cullen, *The Foundations of Celestial Reckoning*, 32–137.

95 See Kalinowski, “Diviners and Astrologers,” 370–72 and 395–96.

“Masters” division.⁹⁶ For the rest, the grand majority of titles mentioned in the “Shushu” division are anonymous. This is certainly what the author of the postscript implies when, in the end, he says without any indication of provenance and attribution that his classification is based upon “ancient writings.”

Six subdivisions share the 110 entries or book titles listed in the “Shushu” division, which places it overall second in the six divisions of the treatise, just behind the division of the “Masters” (see table 4.4).⁹⁷ The first three subdivisions bring together near to two thirds of all the entries (71 of 110) and are in direct relation to the activities of the office of the Grand Scribe. First comes the subdivision “Tianwen 天文” (Heaven patterns). The twenty-two book titles (361 *juan* and 58 *pian*) of which it is composed all concern the interpretation of celestial and atmospheric phenomena. Some (nine titles) are undated collections of prognostics attributed to different specialists (*zazi* 雜子), others (six titles) are explicitly dated to the Han, and six more titles bear the expression *haizhong* 海中 (in the sea), which seems to indicate that these works were destined for use at sea. The observed phenomena are mainly celestial (stars, planets, comets, sun and moon, eclipses) and, to a lesser extent, atmospheric (clouds, rain, rainbows, vapors).⁹⁸

The second subdivision, titled “Lipu 曆譜” (Calendars and chronologies), contains eighteen book titles (566 *juan*) listed one after the other in the following way: astronomical systems (*li* 曆, seven titles), lunar and planetary revolutions (*xingdu* 行度, four titles), chronologies and genealogies (*pu* 譜, two titles), gnomonics (*rigui* 日晷, two titles), reckoning techniques (*suanshu* 算術, two titles), harmonics and calendar making (*luli* 律曆, one title). All of these writings are generally considered relevant to the modern category of science and, in consequence, as being unrelated to the mantic arts. One could even say that it is precisely their presence in the “Shushu” division that renders this term so ambiguous and difficult to translate.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, the author of the postscript cannot but insist on the actual link between calendar calculations and divination: “The techniques for determining the misfortune resulting from

96 Strangely enough, the work attributed to Gan De in the “Shushu” division deals with dream interpretation (*mengzhan*); *Hanshu* 30.1772. On Gan De and his star catalog, see Sun and Kistemaker, *The Chinese Sky*, 75–77.

97 In the following discussion as well as in table 4.5, my counting of book titles, *juan*, and *pian* is based on the actual content of the “Shushu” division, not on the data provided in the postscripts (table 4.4); see Fölster, “The Imperial Collection,” 90 (table D) and 98 (table E).

98 For a translation of the postscript, see Fölster, “The Imperial Collection,” 389.

99 On the translation of “Shushu” in English, see Harper and Kalinowski, *Books of Fate*, “Introduction,” 4–5.

calamities and the good fortune expected from auspicious events all emerged from them [calendar calculations, *lishu* 曆數]. These are the techniques by which the Sages knew fate."¹⁰⁰ A good example of this interconnection is provided by the Mawangdui silk manuscript, titled by the editors "Wuxing zhan 五星占" (Prognostic of the five planets). It combines the precise description of planetary revolutions with considerations upon their applications to divination.¹⁰¹ The same person could have one foot in calendar calculations and the other in mantic arts. This was, for example, the case for Xu Shang 許商, to whom are attributed one of two writings on reckoning (*suanshu*) listed in the present subdivision, and another one on the interpretation of portents based on the five agents classified in the "Six arts" division.¹⁰²

This brings us to the third subdivision whose title, "Wuxing 五行" (Five agents), is strongly indebted to the vast movement of revision and synthesis of cosmological ideas undertaken by scholars from the end of the Western Han. The latter, among whom Liu Xiang and Liu Xin are considered the most instrumental, have made the interpretation of portents the cornerstone of a new hermeneutics of history, grounded in the correlation between the five natural agents (water, fire, wood, metal, and earth) and the five human activities (demeanor, speech, sight, hearing, and thought) as it was established in the two first articles of the "Great model" (*Hongfan*).¹⁰³ Their contradictory and subtly argued interpretations have been collected by Ban Gu in the *Book of Han* under the title "Wuxing zhi 五行志" (Treatise of the five agents).¹⁰⁴ The author of the postscript is obviously in line with this reformist current since he begins by reproducing the entire text of the first two articles of the "Great model" before proceeding.¹⁰⁵

100 *Hanshu* 30.1767. For a full translation of the postscript, see Raphals, "Divination in the *Hanshu*," 84–85; and Fölster, "The Imperial Collection," 389–90.

101 On this manuscript, see Liu, "Daybooks," 29–99; and Cullen, "Understanding the Planets."

102 *Hanshu* 30, "Wuxing zhuanji 五行傳記," 1705.

103 On the strong emphasis put on the first two articles of the "Great model" under the Han, see Nylan, "The Shifting Center," 45–61.

104 *Hanshu* 27A–E.1315–522. The "Treatise of the five agents" in the *Book of Han* initiates a long tradition perpetuated by the authors of all subsequent standard histories until late imperial times. On these treatises, see Mansvelt Beck, "The Portent Monographs"; and Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture*, 135–67.

105 *Hanshu* 30.1769. Note that Liu Xiang is the author of the celebrated *Hongfan wuxing zhuan* 洪範五行傳 (The Great model tradition of the five agents) in which are displayed the principles underlying this new theory of portent interpretation based upon the classificatory paradigm of the five agents. His book is listed in the "Documents" subdivision of the "Six arts" division with a slightly different title; see 1108 in this chapter.

This means that the use of the five activities in order to comply with the five agents has to be promoted. If one fails in demeanor, speech, sight, hearing, and thought, then the order of the five natural agents get disturbed and permutations among the five planets arise: all this constitutes a system of its own that stems from the principles of harmonics and the calendar.

言進用五事以順五行也。貌、言、視、聽、思心失，而五行之序亂，五星之變作，皆出於律曆之數而分為一者也。

It is interesting to note that the author, while placing the subdivision under the authority of the five agents, ultimately makes this new theory of portent interpretation originate in musical harmony and calendar calculations (*lǜlì zhī shù* 律曆之數). This cannot be contradicted because the silk and bamboo manuscripts from the Warring States, the Qin, and the early Han now provide evidence for the extensive use of interpretative models based on the five agents in the field of hemerology and calendrical astrology.

The thirty-one titles (654 *juan*) classified under the subdivision “Five agents” reflect the *parti pris* of the authors of the treatise since, first, nine titles contain the expressions *yinyang* (6 titles), *wuxing* (2 titles) or even *yinyang wuxing* (1 title), which is one of its earliest occurrences in the received literature.¹⁰⁶ It is difficult to tell what distinguishes these writings from those classified under the “Yin-Yang experts” subdivision of the “Masters” division, which curiously does only mention a single title that contains the expression *yinyang*.¹⁰⁷ A second group of ten books concerns hemerology and calendrical astrology. Their titles contain terms such as Taiyi 太一 (Great One), Tianyi 天一 (Heaven One), Kanyu 堪輿 (Canopy-and-chassis), Xing-De 刑德 (Punishment-virtue), Guxu 孤虛 (Orphan-empty), and Shi 式 (mantic device or cosmic model), which all refer to hemerological systems known through the transmitted texts and, above all, through excavated manuscripts, which constitute an invaluable source for the study of the early forms of this important domain of the mantic arts.¹⁰⁸ Other than these two main groups, we find three titles of books on pitch-standard divination, of which an example is given in the above-mentioned Fangmatan manuscript. Three more titles are on techniques related to the five

106 For another occurrence of *yinyang wuxing* in the *Book of Han*, see *Hanshu* 22, “Liyue zhi 禮樂志,” 1057.

107 *Yinyang za* 陰陽雜 (Yin-Yang miscellany) in thirty-eight *pian*.

108 The relevant manuscripts are essentially those on hemerology and calendrical astrology in the Mawangdui collection; see table 4.3 (n50), and n71 in this chapter. See also Liu, “Daybooks,” 86–87; and Li, *Lantai wanjuan*, 184–86. On the Kanyu system in the Han manuscripts, see Harper, “Daybooks in the Context of Manuscript,” 96n17.

musical notes (*wuyin* 五音), of which one applies to a military context and another one to onomastic divination (*dingming* 定名); and the last three are concerned with calamities and prodigies (*zaiyi* 災異). Thus, even if the title “Five agents” has subsequently remained in use, it is far from being representative of the entirety of the books included in this subdivision. It might as well have been named “Yin-Yang” since the term *yinyang* appears three times more often than the term *wuxing* – and this is indeed what happened in some later classifications. The title “Five agents” has also the disadvantage of obscuring the complementarity that exists between the “Calendars and chronologies” subdivision that mainly pertains to calendar calculation, and the one here that concerns above all divinatory applications of harmonics and the calendar.

With the fourth subdivision, labeled “Shigui 蓍龜” (Milfoil and turtle), we move from methods traditionally attributed to the office of the Great Scribe to those under the responsibility of the office of the Great Diviner. Sources related to these two institutions are little known and even sometimes contradictory for the Western Han. There is more ample documentation for the Eastern Han. An important change seems to have been the suppression of the office of the Great Diviner and the transfer of its main activity – turtle and milfoil divination – to the office of the Great Scribe, the functions of which have, on the contrary, undergone a remarkable expansion.¹⁰⁹ This fourth subdivision, for its very position within the “Shushu” division, as well as for the number of books that are listed therein, appears to be a poor cousin of the three preceding subdivisions. Nevertheless, when the author of the postscript writes that it “constitutes what the Sages utilize,” he concedes to turtle and milfoil divination the prestige that it deserves because of its antiquity.¹¹⁰ The method of milfoil divination dominates clearly with nine book titles (319 *juan*) against five titles (158 *juan*) for turtle divination. Eight of these nine titles refer to the *Classic of changes* under the form *Yi* (Changes) or *Zhouyi* (Zhou changes), which is not unrelated to the high status of this collection of oracles, elevated under the Han to the first ranking text among *Wujing* 五經 (The five classics).¹¹¹

109 For the composition of the office of the Grand Scribe under the Eastern Han, see Morgan, *Astral Sciences*, 38. According to the *Hou Han shu* (“Zhi 志” 25.3572), turtle and milfoil divination was then supervised by the office of the Grand Scribe and not by that of the Grand Diviner, which seems to have been abolished for a short period at the beginning of the Eastern Han; Kalinowski, “Divination and Astrology,” 340.

110 *Hanshu* 30.1771; for a full translation of the postscript, see Raphals, “Divination in the *Hanshu*,” 88–89.

111 Writings on the mantic arts are also found in the first subdivision (“Changes”) of the “Six arts” division. From their titles, we can deduce that all these writings are dealing with the interpretation of calamities and prodigies (*zaiyi*) following the tradition of the *Changes* attributed to Jing Fang 京房 (fl. 77–37 BCE); *Hanshu* 30.1703.

The fifth subdivision, “Zazhan 雜占” (Miscellaneous prognostications) is defined in the postscript as follows: “It records the signs of the hundred activities and observes the manifestations of good and bad.... The miscellaneous prognostications are not of one kind, and dream prognostication is the most prominent.”¹¹² Eighteen book titles (312 *juan*) are listed, starting with two dreambooks, one examination method (*xiangshu*) for vestments and other familiar objects, which would have a more appropriate place in the following subdivision, and a text on divination based on body omens, such as sneezing and ear-ringing. Follow five books on demonology and exorcism, as well as three more in connection with prayer rites for prosperity and for bringing or stopping the rain. As was seen in the case of the judgments regarding divination by thinkers from the Warring States and the early Han, the presence of these eight books in the “Shushu” division confirms the strong interaction between mantic arts and propitiatory and exorcist practices at that time. The six remaining book titles are centered on agriculture and livestock farming: field labor, plantations, tree maintenance, fruit conservation, fishing, and fish and turtle farming. Divination seems of little concern in this group, if it was not for references in the titles to such methods as the forecasting of weather conditions for the coming year (*housui* 候歲),¹¹³ and the examination of the good or bad quality of cultivable land (*xiangtu* 相土) and silkworms (*xiangcan* 相蠶). It is probably the technical but not necessarily divinatory nature of these writings that led to their inclusion in the present subdivision rather than in the one called “Nongjia 農家” (Agriculture experts) in the “Masters” division.¹¹⁴

The last subdivision entitled “Xingfa 形法” (Morphoscopy) brings together six book titles (109 *juan* and 13 *pian*) which can be reduced to two groups as the postscript clearly indicates: “This subdivision greatly raises up the natural conformation of the Nine Regions to locate walled cities and domiciles; it configures with measurements the bone model for humankind and the six domestic animals, as well as the distinguishing characteristics of vessels and things, so as to discover the nobility or ignobility and the auspiciousness or

112 *Hanshu* 30.1773; full translation in Fölster, “The Imperial Collection,” 392–93.

113 This method consists in observing weather conditions at the beginning of the year to predict what will happen during the whole year; see *Shiji* 27, “Tianguan shu,” 1340–42. Similar methods are seen in Qin and Han daybooks; see Harper and Kalinowski, *Books of Fate*, 475–76.

114 *Hanshu* 30.1742–43. In contrast to the book titles listed in this subdivision, which refer to specific techniques without mentioning an author’s name, those in the “Nongjia” subdivision only mention author names without any reference to the techniques involved. It is therefore hard to know how they differentiated from one another; it may be that those listed in the “Zazhan” subdivision were anonymous compilations of techniques and recipes related to agriculture and farming, while the others were intellectual writings produced by well-known figures from the Warring States and early Han.

inauspiciousness that they exhibit.”¹¹⁵ In the first group are listed three books on topomancy dealing with earthly configurations and dwelling places. Quite surprisingly, the *Shanhai jing* 山海經 (Classic of the mountains and seas) is among them. It is noteworthy that this work is the only one in the “Shushu” division that has survived until today, and, in this division, one of the four writings that were counted in *pian* rather than in *juan*. It is also the only title for which an editorial record (*bielu*) was written, countersigned by Liu Xin himself in the year 6 BCE.¹¹⁶ The three titles from the second group relate to physiognomy and all carry the term *xiang* 相 in their titles. The term refers to examination methods (*xiangshu*) of which several examples also show up in the subdivision “Miscellaneous prognostications.” The examined phenomena are human beings, domestic animals, and weapons.

In order to facilitate the following discussion on the development of the classification schemes of mantic arts between the Han and late imperial China, table 4.5 gives an overview of the composition of the “Shushu” division, indicating the number of book titles, of *juan* or of *pian* contained in each subdivision, as well as groupings of the works into categories corresponding to their estimated contents.

TABLE 4.5 Overview of the “Shushu” division with its six subdivisions and their estimated contents

“Shushu” subdivisions	Titles	<i>juan/pian</i>	Contents and number of book titles
Heaven patterns	22	361/58	Star catalogs and meteoromancy: undated (9 titles), Han works (6 titles), maritime prognostication (6 titles) Secret records: 1 title ^a
Calendars and chronologies	18	566	Calendrical systems: 7 titles Lunar and planetary calculations: 4 titles Chronologies: 2 titles Gnomonics: 2 titles Reckoning: 2 titles Harmonics: 1 title

a This book title, *Tushu miji* 圖書秘記 (Secret records in charts and writings), is understood by some scholars as referring to the “weft text” (*weishu* 緯書) tradition of the *Hetu* 河圖 (River chart) and the *Luoshu* 洛書 (Luo writing); see Li, *Lantai wanjuan*, 178.

115 *Hanshu* 30.1775; translation follows Liu, “Daybooks,” 87.
116 The record is translated in Fölster, “The Imperial Collection,” 234–37.

TABLE 4.5 Overview of the “Shushu” division with its six subdivisions and their estimated contents (*cont.*)

“Shushu” subdivisions	Titles	<i>juan/pian</i>	Contents and number of book titles
Five agents	31	654	Yin-Yang and/or Five agents: 10 titles Hemerology: 10 titles Pitch-standard divination: 3 titles Five-note divination: 3 titles Calamities and prodigies: 3 titles Comments on graphs: 2 titles ^b
Milfoil and turtle	15	477	Turtle divination: 5 titles Milfoil divination: 9 titles Uncertain: 1 title
Miscellaneous prognostications	18	312	Dream prognostication: 2 titles Physiognomy: 1 title Body omens: 1 title Demonology, exorcisms, prayer rites: 8 titles Farming-related prediction: 6 titles
Morphoscopy	6	109/13	Physiognomy: 3 titles Topomancy: 2 titles <i>Classic of Mountains and Seas</i>
Total	110	2479/71	

b My translation of *wenjie* 文解 by “Comments on graphs” is uncertain. It is based on the fact that the expression *wenjie* is followed in one case by *jiazi* 甲子 (the sixty sexagenary signs) and in the other case by *ershiba xiu* 二十八宿 (the twenty-eight stellar lodges), which could indicate that these writings were commenting on these two basic features of Chinese hemerology and calendrical astrology.

The “Shushu” division accounts for almost 20% of all titles found in the treatise (see table 4.4), with a clear predominance of the first three subdivisions (71 titles of 110). The subdivision “Heaven patterns” has a high level of internal cohesion since the totality of titles concerns the domain of astrology and meteoromancy. The two others, although less homogenous in content, have been conceived in order to distinguish between ideas and practices related to calendar calculations and musical harmony (“Calendars and chronologies”), and those that for the most part are an application thereof to divination (“Five agents”). This distinction was still in a draft stage at the time, and it will become more radical in subsequent classifications. By placing the third subdivision, which is mainly devoted to divinatory applications of musical harmony and the calendar under the classificatory paradigm of the five agents, the authors

of the treatise have responded to their proper doctrinal imperatives. At the same time, they have contributed to complicating matters by forging, *volens nolens*, a new category that brings together, under a single term and without well-defined boundaries, the “yin-yang” and the “five agents.” Occasionally translated in a very approximate way by “correlative cosmology,” the expression *yinyang wuxing* has proved successful in the classification of mantic arts, as well as on a broader level in the history of thought and the history of science.¹¹⁷

There is nothing specific to say about the “Milfoil and turtle” subdivision other than that it is relegated to the fourth position behind the astral sciences, calendar calculations, and calendar-based divination. Also, its title (*shigui*) places milfoil before the turtle, and not the inverse as in the expression *bushi* (turtle and milfoil divination), more frequently found in ancient texts.¹¹⁸ Finally, the two last subdivisions seem less structured than the preceding ones. On the one hand, writings on physiognomy can be found in both the fifth (“Miscellaneous prognostications”) and the sixth (“Morphoscopy”) subdivision. On the other hand, the eight texts that deal with demons, exorcisms and propitiatory rites, as well as the six others on agriculture and livestock farming, represent more than three quarters of the titles contained in the fifth subdivision, whereas one fourth only is reserved for divination *stricto sensu* (see table 4.5). This blending seems heteroclite at first sight and resembles in many ways the inner composition of the manuscripts of the daybook text type. As hemerological miscellanies produced for the quotidian use of inhabitants of districts and cantons, the daybooks, too, present highly varied contents, ranging from the selection of favorable days to carry out an activity, topomantic prescriptions and lists of prohibitions related to agriculture and livestock farming, and ritual prescriptions and magical recipes to eliminate the harmful effects of a nightmare or the intrusion of an evil esprit in the family residence.¹¹⁹ While not implying that the authors of the *Book of Han* bibliographic treatise had any intention to make these miscellaneous collections of popular ideas and practices enter the imperial collections, the similarities that have just been pointed out suggest that the writings contained in the two last subdivisions of the treatise stand apart from those contained in the other four. It is precisely these two last subdivisions that will subsequently undergo the most transformations and

117 On the different uses of expressions such as “correlative thought” and “correlative cosmology” in modern scholarship, see Nylan, “*Yin-yang*, Five Phases,” 409–14.

118 The word compound *shigui* appears in the Han canonical commentaries to the *Changes* (*Zhouyi zhengyi* 7, “Xici A,” 29b).

119 On the editorial structure and content of the first daybook from Shuihudi (Daybook A), see Liu, “Daybooks,” 61–63.

readjustments as the classification of the mantic arts progressively evolves; it will become more refined and enriched by new inputs.

3 Mantic Arts in Bibliographic Catalogs after the Han

More than fifteen centuries separate the compilation of the *Book of Han* bibliographic treatise from the ultimate catalog of imperial collections compiled at the eve of the modern era. During this long period, the making and breaking of libraries accelerated in response to foreign invasions, internal warfare, and dynastic changes. New catalogs emerge at an equal pace. What remains today of these early works provides us with a relatively reliable picture of the place that mantic arts occupied on the shelves of the libraries. It furthermore sheds light on their role in the quotidian experience of the practitioners and in the cultural representations on which, ultimately, the classification of written knowledge is based.

The following presentation relies on those three catalogs that are the most revealing indicators of changes in the typology and classification of divinatory systems between the medieval period and modern times: the bibliographic treatise of the *Suishu* 隋書 (Book of Sui) (completed in 636), which is the second to have come down to us after the *Seven summaries* by Liu Xiang and Liu Xin; the catalog of the *Tongzhi* 通志 (Comprehensive treatises) compiled in 1149, whose quality is largely due to the personality of its author; and the catalog in the *Siku zongmu* 四庫總目 (Book catalog of the complete collection of the Four Treasuries) completed in 1781. The latter marks the culmination of a long process of organization of written knowledge and constitutes the model for authors of catalogs and book collections published since.

3.1 *The Bibliographic Treatise of the Book of Sui (636)*

Following a fire in the imperial palaces and the destruction of the books housed therein at the beginning of the first century CE, the Western Han emperors – emperor Guangwu (r. 25–51) to begin with – were anxious to constitute stocks of ancient and contemporary writings and to have catalogs compiled. This movement gathers momentum during the Six Dynasties (222–589) as the multiplication of centers of power encourages the renewal of big collections held by the reigning dynasties in turn.¹²⁰ Since the third century a system of classification for written knowledge in “four classes” (*sibu* 四部) is put in place.

120 For an overview of the imperial and private libraries from the end of Han to the Tang dynasty, see Drège, *Les bibliothèques*, 19–48 and 145–73.

It prefigured that of the Four Treasuries (*siku* 四庫) which eventually supplanted the classification in six divisions established by Liu Xiang and Liu Xin.¹²¹ As in the *Book of Han* bibliographic treatise, the first place belongs to the class of canonical and assimilated texts, named “Classics” (*jing* 經). Follows in second position “History” (*shi* 史), composed partly of books included in the “Six arts” division of the *Book of Han* treatise and partly of a considerable number of writings on official historiography, on local gazetteers, law, administration, and geography. The third class, that of the “Masters” (*zi* 子), takes on a broader scope since it brings together books that were listed in the *Book of Han* treatise, not only in the corresponding “Masters” (*zhuzi*) division, but also in the “Military writings,” the “Numbers and techniques” and the “Recipes and skills” divisions. Finally, the fourth class, named “Collections” (*ji* 集), substitutes the “Songs and verse” division from the *Book of Han*, supplemented by literary writings of all genres and periods.

The acceptance of the system of four classes is nevertheless far from unanimous as shown by the catalog drawn up by Wang Jian 王儉 (452–89) during the second half of the fifth century. This catalog, entitled *Qizhi* 七志 (Seven treatises) in reference to his illustrious predecessor from the Han, was composed of thirty or forty *juan*. It provided an analytical and critical account of the content of the Liu-Song (420–79) imperial library, where Wang Jian held an official assistant position. The only thing we know with certainty is that the seven treatises were modeled after the *Seven summaries* from the Han, except for the last treatise labeled “Tupu 圖譜” (Charts and lists), which replaced the first division of the catalog by Liu Xiang and Liu Xin devoted, as we have seen, to the principles of collation and edition of texts. Wang Jian has also slightly modified the titles given to the divisions of the *Seven summaries*, notably for the “Shushu” division, which he renamed “Yin-Yang” (see table 4.6).¹²²

Another essential catalog is one compiled shortly after by Ruan Xiaoxu 阮孝緒 (479–536) under the equally significant title, *Qilu* 七錄 (Seven registers).¹²³ It is notable for several reasons. First, its author was an enlightened amateur, a major book collector, and his catalog is characterized by a scope unrivaled at its time. It reflects not only the books in his possession, but

121 The development of the “four classes” system is attributed to Xun Xu 荀勗 (d. 289 CE) and to Li Chong 李充 who revised it at the end of the fourth century; see Drège, *Les bibliothèques*, 108–12. The use of the expression “Four Treasuries” becomes prevalent in Tang times when the books belonging to each class began to be stored at different locations within the capital; see Drège, *Les bibliothèques*, 70–82; and Wilkinson, *Chinese History*, 939.

122 On Wang Jian’s catalog, see Drège, *Les bibliothèques*, 113–14.

123 On this catalog and the biography of its compiler, see Drège, *Les bibliothèques*, 115–20.

also includes writings from other major private collections and the imperial library of the Liang (502–57).¹²⁴ Second, Ruan's classification creates a scholarly combination between the system of four classes and the one in six divisions by Liu Xiang and Liu Xin (see table 4.4). The first four registers, under slightly different but easily recognizable headings, correspond more or less to the four classes: "Classics," "History," "Masters," and "Collections" (see table 4.6). The fifth register, in turn, groups together the two last divisions by Liu Xiang by Liu Xin under the title "Shuji 術伎" (Techniques and skills), a contraction of "Shushu" (Numbers and techniques) and "Fangji" (Recipes and skills).¹²⁵ In addition to these five registers, which constituted the "Neipian 內篇" (Inner book), the two last ones, forming the "Waipian 外篇" (Outer book), are dedicated to Buddhism and Daoism, which altogether makes the desired total of seven registers for the entire catalog.¹²⁶ Third, the number of books contained in each register is known through Ruan Xiaoxu's preface, still extant today (see table 4.6). We learn from it that the seven registers drew up an inventory of 6,288 books representing 44,526 *juan* divided into fifty-five sections. For the five registers of the "Inner book" only, we have 3,453 entries in 37,983 *juan*.¹²⁷

The 505 book titles listed in the fifth register ("Techniques and skills") represented approximately fifteen percent of those included in the "Inner book." They were divided into ten sections, of which six are comparable to the six subdivisions in the "Shushu" division of the *Book of Han* bibliographic treatise: "Heaven patterns" (49 entries), "Calendar and reckoning" (*lisuan* 曆算 instead of *lipu*; 50 entries), "Five agents" (84 entries), "Turtle and milfoil" (*bushi* instead of *shigui*; 50 entries), "Miscellaneous prognostications" (17 entries), and "Morphoscopy" (47 entries).¹²⁸ In other words, as far as mantic

124 Drège (*Les bibliothèques*, 168) notes the existence of book collections specialized in the mantic arts in the sixth century.

125 A book catalog dated to 505 also lists "Shushu" writings in an additional category placed after the "four classes"; see *Guang hongming ji*, T. 2103, 52:110a; and Drège, *Les bibliothèques*, 114.

126 Wang Jian's *Seven treatises* had two additional classes for Buddhist and Daoist scriptures as well, but they were not part of the main book categories represented by the seven treatises; see Drège, *Les bibliothèques*, 114; and van der Loon, *Taoist Books*, 1.

127 Ruan Xiaoxu's (*Qilu xu* 七錄序) preface was included by Dao Xuan 道宣 (596–667) in his *Guang hongming ji* 52:108c–111c. The figures reproduced here are mentioned at the beginning of the preface (110a). They differ slightly from those that one gets by adding the figures given for each particular register (see table 4.6): 6,283 titles in 44,521 *juan* for the seven registers as a whole; and 3,448 titles in 37,983 *juan* for the five registers of the "Inner book." For the content of the seven registers as outlined in Ruan's preface, see Drège, *Les bibliothèques*, 117–19.

128 The four remaining sections deal with weft texts and prophecies ("Weichen 緯讖," 32 titles), medical classics ("Yijing 醫經," 8 titles), medical recipes ("Yifang 醫方," 140

TABLE 4.6 The classification of written knowledge in Wang Jian's Seven treatises and in Ruan Xiaoxu's Seven registers, with the number of sections and book titles in each "register" as recorded in Ruan's preface^a

The <i>Seven treatises</i>	The <i>Seven registers</i>	Sections	Titles (<i>juan</i>)
Classics and canons	Classics and canons	9	591 (4710)
Masters	Records and biographies	12	1020 (14888)
Literature	Masters and army	11	290 (3894)
Military writings	Literary collections	4	1042 (10755)
Yin-Yang	Techniques and skills	10	505 (3736)
Techniques and arts	Buddhism	5	2410 (5400)
Charts and lists	Daoism	4	425 (1138)

a *Guang hongming ji* 52:110b–111a. The figures mentioned in the right column contain errors. For example, the total amount of book titles comprised in the ten sections “Techniques and skills” register is 492 and not 505.

arts are concerned, Ruan Xiaoxu does not introduce any significant innovations with respect to Liu Xiang and Liu Xin, except for the sheer number of works included in the six sections concerned. The register “Techniques and skills” contains nearly three times as many book titles as those listed in the six “Shushu” subdivisions of the treatise by Liu Xiang and Liu Xin (297 titles against 110; see table 4.5).

The reunification of the empire under the Sui (581–618) and Tang dynasties led to a recovery of activities in the domain of conservation of writings inherited from previous periods. To these writings, others, either from collections commissioned by the authorities or newly compiled, were added progressively. Several catalogs were created between 584 and 636, and it is the latest one in date, compiled between 629 and 636, which now occurs in the *Book of Sui* “Jingji zhi 經籍志” (Treatise on classics and books).¹²⁹ Even if this catalog is modeled upon the *Seven summaries* of Liu Xiang and Liu Xin and the *Seven registers* of Ruan Xiaoxu, it adopts a classification strictly based on the system of the four classes. The four classes are in turn divided into forty sections distributed as follows: ten sections in the “Classics” class, thirteen in “History,”

titles), and miscellaneous arts (“Zayi 雜藝,” 15 titles). On Ruan Xiaoxu's decision to place “Shushu” and “Fangji” writings in the same category, see Drège, *Les bibliothèques*, 116.

129 *Suishu* 33–35.903–1104.

fourteen in the “Masters,” and three in the class of “Collections.”¹³⁰ According to the preface of the catalog, the number of titles included in the four classes was 3,127 for books still available under the Sui, and 1,064 for the works lost since the *Seven registers* by Ruan Xiaoxu, thus a total of 4,191 books.¹³¹

Mantic arts are subsumed under the “Masters” class. Four sections are relevant:¹³² on one hand, the tenth section “Bingjia 兵家” (Military experts), which contains 181 titles of which more than a third are writings on divination;¹³³ on the other hand, the three following sections, whose names are no different from the three first subdivisions of the “Shushu” division in Liu Xiang and Liu Xin’s treatise: “Tianwen” (Heaven patterns) for the eleventh section with 134 titles, “Lishu 曆數” (Calendar and calculations)¹³⁴ for the twelfth section with 134 titles, and “Wuxing” (Five agents) for the thirteenth section with 491 titles. As can be seen from table 4.7, the remarkable point here is that the “Five agents” section in the *Book of Sui* contains not only titles classified under the eponymous subdivision in the *Book of Han*, but also those that can be found under the last three ones.

The disappearance of the “Shushu” category – a phenomenon which will subsequently become more widespread – can be explained by the integration of technical writings into the “Masters” class and by a mode of classification of books in the *Book of Sui* catalog which is limited to two levels: “classes” and “sections.” Nevertheless, by reducing the six “Shushu” subdivisions from the *Book of Han* treatise to three sections, the authors certainly wanted to make a more clear-cut distinction than before between the domain of astral sciences, calendar calculations and mathematics represented by the sections “Heaven patterns” and “Calendar and calculations,” and the domain of mantic arts from then on carried over into a single section, namely that of the “Five agents.” This

130 On the inner structure and general content of the four classes of the *Book of Sui* catalog, see Drège, *Les bibliothèques*, 121–26. Just as for Wang Jian’s *Seven treatises*, Daoist and Buddhist scriptures were classified in separate categories; *Suishu* 35.1091–99.

131 *Suishu* 35.1091. Here too, the figures given in the catalog contain scribal and other errors; see Drège, *Les bibliothèques*, 121.

132 According to Yao Zhenzong’s count (Yao, “*Suishu Jingjizhi kaozheng*,” 626c), this section contains 1,653 book titles. The ten other sections duplicate more or less the ten subdivisions in the “Masters” division of the *Book of Han* (see table 4.4). It is worth noting that the “Yin-Yang experts” section lists only one item (while the eponymous subdivision in the *Book of Han* catalog had as many as twenty-one items; see above). From the Tang onwards, the “Yin-Yang experts” category disappears from the catalogs as an independent sub-category of the “Masters” class.

133 On the identification of writings on military divination in this section, see Yao, “*Suishu Jingjizhi kaozheng*,” 514c–517c.

134 The title of this section has been slightly modified in regard to the *Book of Han* catalog (“Lishu” instead of “Lipu”) because the chronologies (*pu*) were transferred to an independent section of the “History” class; *Suishu* 33.988–90.

TABLE 4.7 The three sections on the mantic arts in the *Book of Sui* catalog and the six “Shushu” subdivisions in the *Book of Han* bibliographic treatise

“Shushu” related sections in the <i>Book of Sui</i>		“Shushu” subdivisions in the <i>Book of Han</i>	
Heaven patterns	134	Heaven patterns	22
Calendar and calculations	134	Calendar and chronologies	18
	[1–204]	Five agents	31
Five agents	[205–292]	Milfoil and turtle	15
	[293–455]	Miscellaneous	18
	[456–491]	prognostications	
		Morphoscopy	6
Total book titles	759		110

new distinction also shows through the distribution of tasks in the bureaus of celestial affairs and divination, such as it was established in the administrative code of the Tang and promulgated in the early eighth century. The mantic activities of the department of celestial affairs (*taishi ju* 太史局) were then reduced to astrology and meteoromancy, an activity which will remain permanently under the strict control of the imperial administration, while those of the bureau for divination (*taibu shu* 太卜署) not only covered turtle and milfoil divination, but hemerology, calendrical astrology, and horoscopy as well.¹³⁵

3.2 The Book Catalog in Zheng Qiao’s Comprehensive Treatises (1161)
The catalogs compiled under the Tang and the Song (960–1279) have nothing new to offer in terms of classification of written knowledge. Generally, the system of four classes is maintained with some variants derived from the *Book of Han* and *Book of Sui* bibliographic treatises, as well as from the *Seven registers* by Ruan Xiaoxu.¹³⁶ Real change occurs with the “Yiwen lue 藝文略” (Summary of the arts and letters), one of the twenty summaries (*lue*) compiled by Zheng Qiao 鄭樵 (1104–62) as a supplement to his general history of China from

135 *Da Tang liudian* 10.2b–4a and 23a–33b; and 14.56a–63a. The methods practiced by the members of the divination bureau were: turtle (*gui* 龜) divination; “Five Signs” divination (*wuzhao* 五兆, a form of cleromancy using thirty-six counting rods, see Kalinowski, *Divination et société*, 308–13); divination by the *Changes*; calendrical astrology (*shizhan* 式占, see above 155); and miscellaneous yin-yang prognostications (*yinyang zazhan* 陰陽雜占) including calendar annotations (*lizhu* 曆主) and horoscopy (*luming* 祿命).

136 For an overview of book catalogs compiled during the Tang and the Northern Song (960–1127), see van der Loon, *Taoist Books*, 4–15.

the origins to the Tang dynasty printed in 1161 under the title *Comprehensive treatises*.¹³⁷ This catalog presents the following characteristics. First, rather than being a catalog, the “Summary of the arts and letters” is a list of book titles compiled on the basis of existing collections and catalogs of the time. Zheng Qiao was not tied to a specific library and has started his official career only very late in his life, in 1158, four years prior to his death. As he says himself: “For works on astral sciences and mathematics, one should first turn to imperial observatories, and, if one does not obtain what is looked for, those who in society are versed in these matters should be addressed to find them.”¹³⁸ Then, Zheng took care of the composition of another summary – the “Jiaochou lüe 校讎略” (Summary on the collation and edition of texts) – in which he explains in detail the principles and methods underlying his work, with a special focus upon questions of classification.¹³⁹ His problem was thus not so much to find the best way to order books on the shelves of a library, but to provide a comprehensive and ordered picture of the written knowledge that was available to him. Finally, Zheng Qiao was the first to conceive a mode of classification adapted to the large number and variety of writings listed in his catalog. Believing that “the distinctions drawn in the *Seven summaries* were crude and simplistic, and those in the four class system foolish and groundless,”¹⁴⁰ he took the initiative to increase the number of classes to twelve, and to create a supplementary level of classification, namely the “family” (*jia* 家), inserted between the “class” (*lei* 類) and the “type” (*zhong* 種), among which the 12,123 book titles included in the catalog are distributed (see table 4.8).

Zheng Qiao’s classification clarifies more than modifies that of the preceding catalogs. Canonical and scholarly texts are listed in the classes “Classics,” “Rites,” “Music,” and “Philology”; history and geography are in the “History” class; philosophy and religion in the “Masters” class;¹⁴¹ astral sciences, mathematics, divination, arts, games, and medicine in the classes “Stars and calculations,” “Five agents,” “Arts and games,” and “Medicine”; and, finally, anthologies and general literature in “Encyclopedia” and “Literature.”

137 *Tongzhi lüe*, juan 39–46. On Zheng Qiao’s catalog, see van der Loon, *Taoist Books*, 15–17; and Wang, *Tongzhi ershi lüe* for a critical edition of the twenty summaries.

138 *Tongzhi lüe* 47.7b.

139 *Tongzhi lüe* 47.

140 *Tongzhi lüe* 47.2b.

141 Religion is represented by Daoist (Daojia 道家, twenty-five types and 1,323 titles) and Buddhist (Shijia 釋家, ten types and 334 titles) scriptures, which are included in the “Masters” class just after Confucian writings (“Rushu” 儒術). The inclusion of Daoist and Buddhist scriptures within the four-class system begins with the Tang and becomes common practice in the Song; see van der Loon, *Taoist Books*, 4–6.

TABLE 4.8 The three-level classification in Zheng Qiao “Summary of the arts and letters,” with the number of families (*jia*), types (*zhong*), and book titles (*bu*) comprised in each class^a

The Twelve Classes		Families	Types	Book titles
<i>Jing</i> 經	Classics	9	89	913
<i>Li</i> 禮	Rites	7	54	1314
<i>Yue</i> 樂	Music	1	11	181
<i>Xiaoxue</i> 小學	Philology	1	8	240
<i>Shi</i> 史	History	13	90	2301
<i>Zhuzi</i> 諸子	Masters	11	48	2354
<i>Xingshu</i> 星數	Stars and calculations	3	15	449
<i>Wuxing</i> 五行	Five agents	1	30	1014
<i>Yishu</i> 藝術	Arts and games	1	17	175
<i>Yifang</i> 醫方	Medicine	1	26	662
<i>Leishu</i> 類書	Encyclopedia	1	2	132
<i>Wen</i> 文	Literature	2	22	2388
Totals		51	412	12123

a Figures shown in table 4.8 are based on those recorded in the postscripts of the catalog. They are slightly different from the figures given for the “families” and “types” in the “Summary on the collation and edition of texts” (*Tongzhi lie* 47.2a–2b).

Concerning mantic arts, the three-level classification by Zheng Qiao presents several advantages. First, the six subdivisions of the “Shushu” division from the *Book of Han*, already reduced to three sections in the *Book of Sui* catalog (see table 4.7) are reduced here to two clearly defined classes: one (“Stars and calculations”) is dedicated to astral sciences and mathematics which represent the disciplines associated with the bureau of celestial affairs; the other (“Five agents”) is reserved for all forms of divination with the exception of meteoromancy.¹⁴² The class “Stars and calculations” itself is divided into three families and fifteen types: the family “Heaven patterns” (*tianwen*) which contains eight types of which one is for cosmography and astrometry, another one for Indian astrology, and the six last ones for meteoromancy (182 titles); the family “Calendrical calculations” (*lishu*) with five types dedicated to official and

142 Beside meteoromantic writings which are listed in the “Stars and calculations” class (see below in this paragraph), mantic techniques are also seen in the “Military experts” family of the “Masters” class (“Bing Yin-Yang” 兵陰陽, 99 titles).

unofficial calendar systems as well as to instruments for time measurement (202 titles); and the family “Reckoning techniques” (*suanshu*) with one type for Chinese mathematics and another one for Indian mathematics (65 titles). Altogether they form a group of 449 titles.

It is surprising that for the “Five agents” class, although it contains two times more book titles (1,014 titles) than the preceding one, Zheng Qiao simply formed a single division of thirty types without grouping them by families. Or did he attempt to do so but was not successful, since in the “Summary on the collation and edition of texts” he claims to have divided the class of the “Five agents” into thirty families corresponding to thirty-three types of books?¹⁴³ Again in the same summary, Zheng Qiao severely criticizes the classification of writings on divination in six sections as found in the *Siku que shumu* 四庫闕書目 (Catalog of missing books in the Four Treasuries), a work compiled in 1145, which gives an account of the books in the imperial library of the Song that were lost due to the forced displacement of the dynastic capital from Kaifeng to Hangzhou in 1127.¹⁴⁴ Yet, in this catalog, the order of the six sections is very close to the way in which the thirty types defined by Zheng Qiao are listed.¹⁴⁵ It is thus possible that Zheng Qiao was inspired by the classification in six sections in the *Catalog of missing books in the Four Treasuries*, but, feeling that it was riddled with inconsistencies (and he was not entirely wrong),¹⁴⁶ he finally decided to ignore it and subsume his thirty types directly under the class of the “Five agents.”

Most of the names given by Zheng Qiao to his thirty types take over a keyword from the book titles classified under one same type.¹⁴⁷ This is the reason why the arrangement of types in relation to one another reveals groups of man-tic categories that are, if not identical, at least similar. Some groups are attested since the Han, such as turtle and milfoil divination and divination by the *Changes* (type 1 to 5), physiognomy (types 20 to 23), and topomancy (types 29 and 30). Others appear later and in a less clearly defined way in the catalogs from the early Tang on, as is the case for Three-Model calendrical astrology

143 *Tongzhi lüe* 47.2a.

144 *Songshi Yiwenzhi guangbian*, 2:466–88. On the *Siku que shumu* and its influence on Zheng Qiao's catalog, see van der Loon, *Taoist Books*, 12–15.

145 “Wuxing bushi 五行卜筮” (Five agents, turtle and milfoil), “Renke 壬課” (Three-Model calendrical astrology), “Mingshu 命術” (Fate calculation, horoscopy), “Xiangfa 相法” (Physiognomy), and “Sangshu 喪書” (Tomb topomancy).

146 See *Tongzhi lüe* 47.5a and 9a–9b; and van der Loon, *Taoist Books*, 15–16.

147 For example, all the eleven titles classified under the “Kanyu” (Canopy-and-chassis) type include the term *kanyu* (written 堪餘). On Kanyu hemerology in the Mawangdui silk manuscripts, see n71 in this chapter.

TABLE 4.9 The division in thirty types of the “Five agents” class in Zheng Qiao’s catalog, with the number of book titles listed in each type^a

The thirty types in the “Five agents” class			Book titles
1	<i>Yizhan</i> 易占	Prognostication by the <i>Changes</i>	113
2	<i>Yiguige</i> 易軌革	Hexagram Line-and-Stroke method	12
3	<i>Shizhan</i> 筮占	Milfoil prognostication	7
4	<i>Guibu</i> 龜卜	Turtle cracking	24
5	<i>Shefu</i> 射覆	Guessing hidden things	7
6	<i>Zhanmeng</i> 占夢	Dream prognostication	7
7	<i>Zazhan</i> 雜占	Miscellaneous prognostications	21
8	<i>Fengjiao</i> 風角	Wind angle divination	32
9	<i>Niaoqing</i> 鳥情	Bird behavior method	10
10	<i>Nici</i> 逆刺	Prospective divination	4
11	<i>Dunjia</i> 遁甲	Evading Stem system	71
12	<i>Taiyi</i> 太乙	Great One system	48
13	<i>Jiugong</i> 九宮	Nine Palaces system	18
14	<i>Liuren</i> 六壬	Six <i>ren</i> system	82
15	<i>Shijing</i> 式經	Books on mantic models	22
16	<i>Yinyang shu</i> 陰陽書	Yin-Yang writings	71
17	<i>Yuanchen</i> 元辰	Prime chronogram method	17
18	<i>Sanming</i> 三命	Three Fate method	101
19	<i>Xingnian</i> 行年	Year Motion method	24
20	<i>Xiangfa</i> 相法	Physiognomic methods	73
21	<i>Xianghu</i> 相筭	<i>hu</i> -tablet physiognomy	6
22	<i>Xiangyin</i> 相印	Seal physiognomy	2
23	<i>Xiangzi</i> 相字	Glyphomancy	2
24	<i>Kanyu</i> 堪輿	Canopy-and-Chassis system	11
25	<i>Yitu</i> 易圖	Diagrams of the <i>Changes</i>	12
26	<i>Hunjia</i> 婚嫁	Marriage	12
27	<i>Chanru</i> 產乳	Delivery and nursing	8
28	<i>Dengtán</i> 登壇	Ascending altars	11
29	<i>Zhaijing</i> 宅經	Classics of dwellings	37
30	<i>Sangshu</i> 喪書	Writings on funerals	149
Total of book titles			1014

a After Kalinowski, “Mantic Texts,” 115, table 5.1, with modifications.

(types 11 to 15) and horoscopy (types 17 to 19).¹⁴⁸ Books on hemerology are, for their part, grouped together in type 16 “Yin-Yang writings,” and oneiromancy (type 6) is on the contrary dissociated from “Miscellaneous prognostications” (type 7), whereas it was included in the eponymous subdivision of the catalog by Liu Xiang and Liu Xin. If we quantify the number of book titles contained in each group thus defined, we obtain the following ranking: Three-Model calendrical astrology clearly stands out from the rest with a total of 241 titles, followed by topomancy (186 titles), turtle and milfoil divination and divination by the *Changes* (163 titles),¹⁴⁹ horoscopy (142 titles), physiognomy (83 titles), and so forth. All these particularities should be understood in relation to the situation of mantic arts in Song society and against the background of how divination was perceived and practiced in scholarly circles.¹⁵⁰

Going back in time, it is interesting to note that, even if the “Five agents” section of the bibliographic treatise of the *Suishu* does not contain subdivisions (see table 4.7), most of the cited book titles also occur in Zheng Qiao’s catalog. In his detailed study of the *Suishu* treatise, the Qing scholar Yao Zhenzong 姚振宗 (1842–1906) has subdivided the 491 book titles contained in the “Five agents” section of the treatise into thirty-one groups by adopting the terminology established by Zheng Qiao in his catalog.¹⁵¹ This shows that the typology of divinatory systems as it was gradually enhanced during the medieval period has remained remarkably stable during the five centuries that separate the early Tang from the Southern Song (1127–1279).

3.3 *The Book Catalog of the Complete Collection of the Four Treasuries (1781)*

The third catalog to be examined is the last of the grand imperial bibliographic catalogs. Compiled under the Qing, it forms part of the monumental editorial project initiated in 1772 by emperor Qianlong (r. 1735–96). The goal was to endow the Manchu dynasty with a book collection surpassing in size and

148 On the grouping of writings on Three-Model calendrical astrology (Dunjia, Taiyi, Liuren) in the *Book of Sui* bibliographic treatise, see Yao, “Suishu Jingjizhi kaozheng,” 555 (group 3), 557 (group 4), 559 (group 5), 562 (group 10), and 464 (group 12); on book titles dealing with horoscopy, see 560 (group 8) and 578 (group 18).

149 Note that the “Yi” (*Changes*) family of the “Classics” class contains 241 book titles, some of them being explicitly related to divination, such as the *Sheshi fa* 揲蓍法 (Method for sorting milfoil stalks); see *Tongzhi lue* 39.6a. On the uses of the *Changes* during the Song, see Smith et al., *Sung Dynasty Uses of the I Ching*.

150 On the practice of divination among the Song elites, see Liao, “Exploring Weal and Woe.”

151 For a table comparing the thirty types of the “Five agents” class in Zheng Qiao’s catalog and the subdivisions carried out by Yao Zhenzong in the “Five agents” section of the *Book of Sui* bibliographic treatise, see Kalinowski, *Divination et société*, 15–16.

quality all preceding ones. The direction of the project was confined to Ji Yun 紀昀 (1724–1805) and to a cohort of several hundreds of government officials specifically reunited in order to carry out the work of collecting, selecting, and editing texts. Ten years later, in 1782, the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (Complete collection of the Four Treasuries) is published and four manuscript copies are put into the collection of the Forbidden City in Beijing. At the same time, a catalog accompanied by critical abstracts (*tiyao* 提要) is written for the 3,471 book titles comprised in the collection by scholars versed in philological studies (*kaozhengxue* 考證學), which were in full swing at the time. In addition, 6,793 supplementary abstracts are integrated into the catalog; they concern writings that were listed by Ji Yun and his team but not reproduced in the collection. The final version of the catalog is printed in 1794 under the title *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* 四庫全書總目提要 (General catalog with abstracts of the complete collection of the Four Treasuries; hereafter *Siku* catalog).¹⁵²

The 10,164 book titles and their critical notes are distributed according to the system of the four classes, which in turn were divided into forty-four categories (*lei*), of which some consisted of branches (*shu* 屬), sixty-four altogether.¹⁵³ Mantic arts are grouped together under the “Masters” class, which contains fourteen categories arranged in an order that reveals the ideological biases of the compilers of the catalog. Confucian writings (*rujia*) are first, followed by military writings (*bingjia*), legal texts (*fajia*), texts on agriculture (*nongjia*), on medicine (*yijia*), and on astronomy and mathematics (*tianwen suanfa* 天文算法). According to the preface, these six categories represent fields of knowledge that are useful for the governance of the empire (*zhishi* 治世). The next two categories, labelled “minor practices” (*xiaodao* 小道), are those of mantic arts and fine arts (calligraphy, painting, music, chess). The remaining categories concern other forms of knowledge and literary genres, placing Buddhist and Daoist writings in the last position.¹⁵⁴

A remarkable aspect of this classification is that astronomy and mathematics are somewhat dissociated from the mantic arts under the pretext that they are useful for the governance of the empire, whereas mantic arts are part of practices related to the sphere of private life, just like calligraphy, painting, music and the game of chess. This dissociation is even more remarkable, since meteoromancy has been eliminated from the category of astronomy and

152 On the *Siku* library and catalog, see Wilkinson, *Chinese History*, 945–54.

153 For the names given to the four classes and the forty-four categories in the *Siku* library and catalog, see Wilkinson, *Chinese History*, 953, table 145.

154 *Siku quanshu zongmu* 91.1b–2a.

mathematics and integrated into the mantic arts.¹⁵⁵ The same propensity to group together divinatory practices in one unique category applies equally to the category of military writings which does no longer contain any divination texts. The classification of the *Siku* catalog constitutes in this regard the culmination of a long process of clarification of the relation that exists between knowledge belonging to the modern category of science and that which is part of the domain of divination, associated here with the arts of the educated elite such as calligraphy, painting, and music.

This is without doubt the reason why the compilers of the catalog have picked up again the term *shushu* (under its inverted form “Techniques and numbers”) introduced under the Han by Liu Xiang and Liu Xin to name this category which from then on was, entirely and without ambiguity, devolved to mantic arts. The “Shushu” category was further divided into seven branches arranged in order of precedence (see table 4.10).

TABLE 4.10 The seven branches of the “Shushu” category in the *Siku* catalog; with the number of books (and *juan*) included in the collection (*cunshu* 存書), and the number of books (and *juan*) listed by title only (*cunmu* 存目)

The Seven Branches		<i>cunshu</i> (<i>juan</i>)	<i>cunmu</i> (<i>juan</i>)	Sub-totals
<i>Shuxue</i> 數學	Numerology	16 (147)	29 (165)	45 (312)
<i>Zhanhou</i> 占候	Meteoromancy	2 (135)	26 (380)	28 (515)
<i>Xiangzhai Xiangmu</i> 相宅相墓	Dwelling and tomb topomancy	8 (17)	18 (132)	26 (149)
<i>Zhanbu</i> 占卜	“Divination”	5 (37)	24 (62)	29 (99)
<i>Mingshu Xiangshu</i> 命書相書	Books on horoscopy and physiognomy	14 (53)	18 (29)	32 (82)
<i>Yinyang wuxing</i> 陰陽五行	Yin-Yang and Five agents	5 (55)	26 (163)	31 (218)
<i>Zaji</i> 雜技	Various skills		6 (52)	6 (52)
Totals		50 (444)	147 (983)	197 (1427)

155 See table 4.5.

The books listed in the “Shuxue” (literally: “learning about numbers”) branch lay the numerological and cosmological foundations upon which – in the eyes of the compilers – all forms of divination rely. Following a well-established tendency since the Song, the first place goes to the *Changes*. In this regard, the preface is significant for the hegemonic claims of the Classic in the domain of mantic arts as well as in those of erudition, thought and culture in general: “Most of the *shushu* techniques have developed after the Qin and Han dynasties. Basically, these techniques never exceed the limits defined by the cycles of production, conquest, control, and transformation of yin-yang and the five agents. Truly speaking, they are no more than an offspring of the *Changes*, to which were progressively aggregated various related theories.”¹⁵⁶

In second position is the branch of writings on celestial and atmospheric portents, which were eliminated from the “Astronomy and mathematics” category and transferred here by the compilers due to the refocusing of mantic arts mentioned earlier. The third position is occupied by writings on dwelling and tomb topomancy, a certain promotion with respect to the earlier catalogs (see tables 4.5, 4.8, and 4.10) probably due to the unprecedented development of ideas and practices related to Fengshui 風水 (Winds and Waters) since the Song dynasty.¹⁵⁷

The fourth position is held on the one hand by writings on turtle and milfoil divination (generally classified in a separate group), and on the other hand, by writings on Liuren 六壬 (Six *ren*), one of the three systems in Three-Model calendrical astrology.¹⁵⁸ The reason for this grouping is difficult to explain, if it was not because of the wide diffusion of the Liuren system in society when compared to the more restricted use of the two other systems (see below the branch “Yin-Yang and Five agents”).¹⁵⁹ The compilers are not explicit about the motivations that led them to such an arrangement and they comment on the title “Divination” (*zhanbu*) given to this branch in the following way: “As a matter of fact, all techniques claiming to derive from the *Changes* and using calculations to find out what is auspicious and what is not, may generally be called ‘divination.’”¹⁶⁰ This definition prefigures in a certain way the meaning

156 General preface to the “Shushu” category; *Siku quanshu zongmu* 108.1a.

157 On the rise and development of Fengshui ideas and practices, see Smith, *Fortune-Tellers*, 131–71.

158 On Three-Model calendrical astrology, see 155 in this chapter.

159 See *Da Tang liudian* 14.60a. This kind of grouping is already seen in the *Wenxian tongkao* of Sima Guang 司馬光 (1254–1323) where it is labeled “Zhanshi 占筮” (Prognostication and milfoil); *Wenxian tongkao* 1782c–1784a.

160 *Siku quanshu zongmu* 109.22b.

of this term in modern Chinese, but its semantic scope here is much narrower since the seven branches in the “Shushu” category are all related to divination.

For the following two branches, the compilers have also proceeded to groupings, no doubt because of the symbolic connotation of the number “seven.” The fifth branch includes writings on horoscopy and physiognomy, bringing together two mantic techniques centered on the human person: one based on the calculation of the birth horoscope of individuals (*mingshu*), and the other based on the examination of their body features (*xiangshu*).¹⁶¹ The name of the sixth branch (“Yin-Yang and Five agents”) corresponds more or less to the divisions sometimes labeled “Five agents” and sometimes “Yin-Yang” in the early catalogs, beginning with the one in the *Book of Han*. Classified therein are, writings on hemerology on the one hand, and works on calendrical astrology on the other hand, namely the Dunjia 遁甲 (Evading Stem) and Taiyi 太乙 (Great One) systems representative – together with the Liuren system listed in the “Divination” branch – of Three-Model calendrical astrology.

The last position goes to the “Various skills” branch, which contains six titles that are not reproduced in printed form in the *Complete collection of the Four Treasuries*: three books on dream divination (*mengzhan*), two on glyphomancy (*cezi* 測字 or *chaizi* 拆字), and one on pulse divination (*maifa* 脈法) or sphymomancy.¹⁶²

The classification of mantic arts in the *Siku* catalog offers the advantage of having for the first time brought together the totality of writings on divination in a single category. The authors of the catalog named it “Shushu,” thus referring back in inverted form (“Techniques and numbers”) to the heading initially created by Liu Xiang and Liu Xin. It is difficult to say whether they just wanted to improve the classifications established in the early catalogs, or if they had in mind to marginalize the mantic arts in order to serve the policy of institutional disengagement advocated by certain fringe groups of the scholarly elite.¹⁶³ Anyway, the typology of divination established by the compilers of the *Siku* catalog, in spite of the imprecision of the names given to some of the branches, offers a remarkable synthesis of divinatory practices attested in ancient texts from the Han to the Song, and from the Song to the modern period.

161 Richard Smith follows the *Siku* catalog and discusses horoscopy and physiognomy in the same chapter (“Reading Fate”) of his book on divination in late imperial China (Smith, *Fortune-Tellers*, 174–201).

162 On pulse divination under the Song, see Liao, “Exploring Weal and Woe,” 360n46.

163 Henderson, *The Development and Decline*, 175–206 and 227–53. The office of celestial affairs was nevertheless in charge of the yearly production of calendars with their attached hemerological prescriptions (*Shixian shu* 時憲書); see Smith, “The Legacy of Daybooks,” 347–53.

The classification of the *Siku* catalog will be resumed and readjusted by the editors of most of the large book collections addressed to a cultivated audience during the twentieth century. This is for example the case of the *Gujin congshu jicheng* 古今叢書集成 (Compendium of ancient and recent book series; hereafter *Congshu jicheng*), a huge collection of 4,107 works reproduced in different formats since the 1930s. In this collection, the category “Shushu” is subdivided into ten branches, and no longer seven, as in the *Siku* catalog.¹⁶⁴ The same subdivision into ten branches has been adopted more recently (1997) in the *Shushu lei guji daquan* 術數類古籍大全 (Complete collection of the *shushu* category of ancient books) in ninety volumes.¹⁶⁵ This collection of 333 books entirely devoted to mantic arts supplements favorably those in the *Complete collection of the Four Treasuries* and in the *Congshu jicheng*.

Modifications introduced by the shift from seven to ten branches improve the legibility of the classification on several grounds (see table 4.11). First, the puzzling “Divination” branch in the *Siku* catalog is now divided into three independent branches: one for divination by the *Changes* (“Yizhan”), another for Liuren calendrical astrology (“Liuren”), and a third one titled “Miscellaneous prognostications” (“Zazhan”) that contains works on turtle divination, clero-mancy, calendrical astrology (Taiyi system), and glyptomancy, together with popular divination manuals using “divining blocks” (*beijiao* 栲校) or “dominos” (*yapai* 牙牌).¹⁶⁶ Second, works on Dunjia calendrical astrology, which in the seven branch system were part of the “Yin-Yang and Five agents” branch, are now classified in a separate branch (“Dunjia”), while the modified “Yin-Yang and Five agents” branch is mainly devoted to hemerological writings, with the addition of some texts related to the five agents and the interpretation of omens.¹⁶⁷ Third, certain branch headings were modified or abbreviated: “Dwelling and tomb topomancy” (*xiangzhai xiangmu*) was changed to “Kanyu” (Canopy-and-chassis),¹⁶⁸ and “Books on horoscopy and physiognomy” (*minggshu xiangshu*) abbreviated as “Horoscopy and Physiognomy” (*mingxiang*).

164 *Baibu congshu jicheng fenlei mulu* 3.35b–3.39b.

165 See *Zengbu siku weishou shushu lei guji daquan* in the bibliography.

166 See *Zengbu siku weishou shushu lei guji daquan*, Part 5, 919–28 for the casting of divining blocks, and 929–40 for domino divination.

167 The “Yin-Yang and Five agents” branch of the *Shushu lei guji daquan* includes thirty-two books of which ten are on the interpretation of auspicious omens (*ruiying* 瑞應). There are also several collected sayings of famous characters from the Warring States such as Zou Yan and the astrologer Zi Wei whose names are listed in the “Yin-Yang experts” sub-division of the “Masters” division in the *Book of Han* catalog.

168 On the change in the meaning of the term *kanyu* between the Han and the Song, see Loewe, “The Term K’an-yü.”

TABLE 4.11 Comparison between the seven-branch classification of the *Siku* catalog and the ten-branch classification of the *Congshu jicheng*

Ten Branch classification	Seven Branch classification	
<i>Shuxue</i> 數學	Numerology	Numerology
<i>Zhanhou</i> 占候	Meteoromancy	Meteoromancy
<i>Yizhan</i> 易占	Divination by the <i>Changes</i>	"Divination"
<i>Liuren</i> 六壬	Six <i>ren</i> system	
<i>Zazhan</i> 雜占	Miscellaneous prognostications	
<i>Kanyu</i> 堪輿	Topomancy (Canopy-and-Chassis)	Dwelling and tomb topomancy
<i>Mingxiang</i> 命相	Horoscopy, physiognomy	Books on horoscopy and physiognomy
<i>Dunjia</i> 遁甲	Evading Stem system	Yin-Yang and five agents
<i>Yinyang wuxing</i> 陰陽五行	Yin-Yang and Five agents	
<i>Zashu</i> 雜術	Various techniques	Various skills

4 Encyclopedias and Popular Practices

Encyclopedias (*leishu*) constitute a second crucial source for the study of the classification of mantic knowledge and practices. These vast anthologies composed of citations drawn from writings of all kinds and of all periods of history were initially meant for the education of emperors and their entourage. They embraced all fields of knowledge classified according to the principle of the Three Realms (*sancal* 三才): the celestial realm for stars and meteorites, seasons, and annual festivals; the terrestrial realm for geography, administrative divisions, mountains and rivers; and the human realm with, in the first place, biographies of sovereigns and their families, followed by anything that relates to human beings (physical traits, moral conduct, emotions, official functions, relations with others, rites and music, government, habitat, agriculture and livestock farming, objects of daily life), to minerals, plants, and animals.¹⁶⁹

In encyclopedias from the medieval period, mantic arts appear in the category of human affairs under the title "Fangshu 方術" (Recipes and techniques), next to practices for longevity and medicine. Initially reduced to turtle

169 For the classification systems in *leishu*, see Wilkinson, *Chinese History*, 956–61.

and milfoil divination and physiognomy, the “Fangshu” division is gradually enlarged by other mantic techniques. Thus, in the *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (Imperial readings of the Great Peace era) completed in 982, there are four sections on divination: turtle divination (nine subsections), milfoil divination, physiognomy, meteoromancy (four subsections); dreams are equally present but placed into a different section.¹⁷⁰

The most prestigious of all imperial encyclopedias is the *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成 (Compendium of ancient and recent charts and books; hereafter *Tushu jicheng*).¹⁷¹ Completed under the reign of the Kangxi emperor (r. 1661–1722) but printed posthumously (1726–28), this monumental work in 10,000 *juan* offers an excellent point of comparison with the bibliographic catalogs, notably with the *Siku* catalog compiled, as pointed out earlier, some sixty years later. The *Tushu jicheng* contains six collections (*huibian* 彙編) modeled after the Three Realms and divided into thirty-two sections (*dian* 典), which, in turn, were subdivided into 6,117 subsections (*bu*).¹⁷² Mantic arts are brought together in the “Yishu” 藝術 (Arts and techniques) section of the fourth collection. This section is composed of forty-three subsections covering agriculture, crafts, medicine, painting and divination, which occupies seven subsections for a total of 208 *juan* out of 824 (see table 4.12 below).

TABLE 4.12 The seven subsections on divination in the “Arts and techniques” section of the *Tushu jicheng* encyclopedia

Subsection titles		<i>juan</i>
<i>Bushi</i> 卜筮	Turtle and Milfoil	541–564
<i>Xingming</i> 星命	Horoscopy	565–630
<i>Xiangshu</i> 相術	Physiognomy	631–650
<i>Kanyu</i> 堪輿	Topomancy	651–680
<i>Xuanze</i> 選擇	Hemerology	681–686
<i>Shushu</i> 術數	Techniques and numbers	687–746
<i>Zashu</i> 雜術	Various techniques	747–748

170 *Taiping yulan*, *juan* 725–26 (Turtle), 727–28 (Milfoil), 729–31 (Physiognomy), and 732–33 (Meteoromancy). The sub-sections on dreams are placed in the “Human affairs” (*renshi* 人事) category, *juan* 397–400.

171 Full title *Qinding* 欽定 (Imperially approved) *gujin tushu jicheng*.

172 For a summary of the *Tushu jicheng* encyclopedia, see Wilkinson, *Chinese History*, 960, table 149.

These seven subsections have the following distinguishing features with respect to the classification into seven branches of the *Siku* catalog and into ten branches in the *Congshu jicheng* (tables 4.11 and 4.12). To begin with, the first subsection is named “Turtle and milfoil,” which has the effect of not introducing at the outset the idea that mantic arts are merely products derived from the cosmology and numerology of the *Changes*, even if this subsection is primarily composed of quotations from the Classic and related writings. Then, problematic titles, such as “Zhanbu” (Divination) or “Yinyang wuxing” (Yin-Yang and Five agents) have been avoided, except for “Shushu” (Techniques and numbers) which applies here, not to the mantic arts in general as in the *Book of Han*, but solely to Three-Model calendrical astrology, thus regrouping in a single subsection the Dunjia, Taiyi, and Liuren systems, which were listed under different branches in the *Siku* catalog and in the *Congshu jicheng*. Lastly, we note the absence of meteoromancy, which the compilers preferred to place in a separate section entitled “Shuzheng 庶徵” (Various portents) within the collection of astral sciences.¹⁷³

The titles of the seven subsections in the *Tushu jicheng* and the order in which these subsections are arranged correspond perfectly well with the six major mantic systems identified with more or less precision in the book catalogs and encyclopedias since the Song. The first position goes to turtle and milfoil divination (*bushi*) due to its antiquity and mainly because of the central role played by the *Changes* in Chinese culture. The two following positions are occupied by horoscopy (*xingming*) and physiognomy (*xiangshu*), both of them closely related to human idiosyncrasies, and classified under the same branch in the *Siku* and the *Congshu jicheng* (see table 4.10 and 4.11). The fourth position is taken by topomancy (*kanyu*) or divination on the influence exerted by the natural environment and the conformation of residences and tombs on the destiny of individuals. The two final grand categories are represented by hemerology (*xuanze*) and Three-Model calendrical astrology (*shushu*), which are clearly distinguished one from another. This was far from being the case in earlier classifications. Finally, a supplementary subsection entitled “Zashu” (Various techniques) is allocated to glyphomancy and two other game-like divining methods.¹⁷⁴ All the bibliographic catalogs since the *Book of Han* contain this kind of division, which is a ragbag in which are listed non-divinatory

173 *Qinding gujin tushu jicheng*, “Lixiang huibian 曆象彙編,” “Shuzheng dian,” *juan* 1–163.

174 These two methods are Shefu 射覆 (Guessing hidden things) already seen in the *Book of Sui* catalog (see table 4.9; and Smith, *Fortune-Tellers*, 210), and Guaying 卦影 (Hexagram image divination (see Smith, *Fortune-Tellers*, 210; and Liao, “Exploring Weal and Woe,” 367–68).

techniques and methods considered as minor or as falling outside of the framework defined by the six major systems.¹⁷⁵ One can thus say that during the eighteenth century the typology of mantic arts acquires a stable and virtually definitive shape, and this typology will remain the basic framework for discussion of Chinese divination in modern times.¹⁷⁶

To which extent are learned classifications, elaborated for centuries by scholars and intellectuals guided by Confucian values and working mostly under official sponsorship, representative of mantic practices within society as a whole? For the ancient period, attempts have been made to classify divinatory manuscripts on bamboo and silk from the end of the Warring States, the Qin, and the Han on the basis of the six “Shushu” subdivisions in Liu Xiang’s and Liu Xin’s catalog. The results obtained show that a large part of the manuscripts discovered to date present – retrospectively and on a local and regional scale – similarities with book titles listed in the “Shushu” division of the catalog, mainly in the “Miscellaneous prognostications” subdivision, which is the most appropriate for drawing such parallels.¹⁷⁷

For the medieval period, we are fortunate enough to have the manuscripts related to mantic arts from the ninth and tenth centuries discovered in the remote region of Dunhuang (Gansu province) in the early twentieth century. In spite of their popular aspect, the fact that these writings offer numerous parallels with book titles listed in the *Book of Sui* catalog proves that the same texts as those circulating in the central provinces were available to practitioners of the mantic arts in the Dunhuang area.¹⁷⁸ In his biographic studies of doctors, diviners, and occult specialists (*fangshi* 方士) mentioned in the standard histories of the Six Dynasties, Kenneth DeWoskin has counted the techniques that are attributed to them. Of about forty terms contained in his list, more than half concern divination and there is basically none that is not part

175 Methods most often listed in the “Various techniques” or “Miscellaneous prognostications” category in the bibliographical catalogs and imperial encyclopedia are oneiromancy, glyphomancy, pulse divination, body omens, physiognomy, divining blocks, exorcisms, etc. See below in this chapter the discussion of popular mantic practices.

176 For example, the historian of science Joseph Needham divides mantic disciplines (labeled as “pseudo-sciences”) in ancient and pre-modern China into nine categories based on the classification of the *Siku* catalog and the *Tushu jicheng* encyclopedia; see Needham, *Science and Civilisation*, 2:346–64.

177 For a classification of the Warring States, Qin, and Han excavated texts on the basis of the six “Shushu” subdivisions of the *Book of Han* catalog, see Liu, *Jianbo shushu*, and Liu, “Daybooks,” 84–89.

178 See Kalinowski, *Divination et société*, 11–20.

of the book titles in the *Book of Sui* catalog.¹⁷⁹ All this leads to the conclusion that, for the ancient and medieval periods, the terminology in use for qualifying most of the divinatory practices was widely shared by the members of the scholarly elite, be it through direct contact with these practices, through book learning, or simply by “seeing the title of a book without looking at its content” (*jianming bu jianshu* 見名不見書), a critique put forward by Zheng Qiao in his summary on the collation and edition of texts.¹⁸⁰

Under the following dynasties up to the modern period, the profusion of available sources is such that it becomes impossible to give a meaningful account of those sources without exceeding the scope of the present chapter. Let me just focus on two points directly related to the question of typology and classification of the mantic arts. First, with the unprecedented development of writings meant for a large audience and conceived to be used by everyone, we can observe the emergence of classifications that include forms of popular or popularized divination, which, without really disturbing those seen in bibliographic catalogs and imperial encyclopedias, are of particular interest because they are in close touch with the practices that actually prevailed in society. One major source of information in this respect are the vast compilations from the Ming and the Qing named “encyclopedias for daily use” (*riyong leishu*) in modern research and the almanacs (*tongshu* 通書) published annually in considerable number all over the country. As Richard Smith puts it: “Almanacs provided a great deal of information on matters relating to agriculture, business, health, family life, food, etiquette, travel, and, of course, divination. In this respect they closely resemble encyclopedias for daily use.”¹⁸¹ I will thus limit myself to a presentation of the material directly concerned with mantic arts in a then much in vogue encyclopedic genre: the *Wanbao quanshu* 萬寶全書 (Complete book of myriad treasures). One of these encyclopedias compiled in 1628 by Ai Nanying 艾南英 (1583–1646) contains thirty-seven entries (*men* 門), of which one third are related to divination (see table 4.13).¹⁸²

179 See DeWoskin, “A Source Guide,” 104; and DeWoskin, *Doctors, Diviners and Magicians*, 22–39 for more details.

180 *Tongzhi lüe* 47.6a.

181 On the content of almanacs in the Qing, see Smith, “The Legacy of Daybooks,” 353–67, and 357 for the quotation.

182 This version of the *Wanbao quanshu* is kept in the library of Keiō University in Japan under the title *Xinke Ai xiansheng tianluge huibian caijing bianlan wanbao quanshu* 新刻艾先生天祿閣彙編採精便覽萬寶全書.

TABLE 4.13 Entries relating to divination in an early version of the Complete book of myriad treasures (1628)

Entries on divination in the *Wanbao quanshu*

1	<i>Tianwen</i> 天文	Heaven patterns
10	<i>Shiling</i> 時令	Seasonal ordinances
20	<i>Xiangfa</i> 相法	Physiognomy
22	<i>Mengzhan</i> 夢占	Oneiromancy
24	<i>Zhaijing</i> 宅經	Classics of dwellings
27	<i>Suanming</i> 算命	Fate calculation
28	<i>Shuming</i> 數命 ^a	Fate computation
29	<i>Dili</i> 地理	Topomancy
30	<i>Tongshu</i> 通書	Almanacs
31	<i>Bushi</i> 卜筮	Turtle and milfoil
32	<i>Fabing</i> 法病	Managing illnesses
34	<i>Bugao</i> 卜筮	Casting divining blocks
37	<i>Zalan</i> 雜覽	Miscellanea

a The difference between *suanming* (fate calculation) and *shuming* (fate computation) is that “fate computation” consists in determining the fate of an individual by using a simplified method that correlates the stem and branch components of the 60-day cycle with the finger joints.

The encyclopedia begins with an entry devoted to celestial phenomena, including a subentry on astromantic portents (*xiangyi* 祥異). The tenth entry on seasonal ordinances contains, too, a subentry on weather forecasting (*zhan tianshi* 占天時). Eleven entries on divination are found in the second half of the encyclopedia. The order in which the entries are arranged is not clear, the compilers probably wanted to begin with the more widely spread methods or those that were in relation with the personal destiny of an individual and his natural environment, such as physiognomony, oneiromancy, housing (*zhaijing*), horoscopy (*suanming*), and topomancy (*dili*). Hemerology is represented by the thirtieth entry on almanacs (*tongshu*). Contrary to imperial encyclopedias in which it ranks first in classifications, turtle and milfoil divination occupies the thirty-first position and its title (*bushi*) does not correspond to the content of the entry, which is neither concerned with turtle plastrons nor with milfoil stalks, but solely with popular forms of divination by the *Changes*.¹⁸³

183 See Smith, *Fortune-Tellers*, 111–12.

The two following entries are devoted to iatromantic procedures (*fabing*, generally written *qubing* 祛病 “dispelling illness”) and to techniques of casting divining blocks (*bugao*) already mentioned earlier under the form *beijiao*. The entry “Miscellanea” occurs last with two sub-entries on riddles and glyptomantic games. The number of entries relevant to divination in the *Complete book of myriad treasures* vary from one version to another, and they all consist of heteroclite blends of popular and scholarly methods.¹⁸⁴ The fact that these entries occupy an important place in daily-life encyclopedias attests to the centrality of divination in the popular culture of late imperial times.

As for the second point, we have seen that the solution adopted by bibliographers in order to account for minor divination methods and practices that are marginal to divination has been the creation of a special category in which these methods and practices could be grouped together under the same heading. Since the catalog of the *Book of Han*, the subdivision “Miscellaneous prognostications” lists works on a wide range of topics such as oneiromancy, clothing physiognomy, body omens, predictions on agriculture, demonology, exorcisms, and prayer rites. This type of subdivision will be perpetuated in all later classifications, with various content and a tendency to eliminate texts on demonology and exorcisms. It remains in use today, as shown by the classification of mantic arts into ten categories in one of the major dictionaries on divination and occult knowledge published in 1991 by Chen Yongzheng 陳永正 in Guangzhou.¹⁸⁵ While nine categories consisting of a single entry do correspond, except for minor variations, to the six major systems in the *Tushu jicheng*, the tenth category, precisely entitled “Miscellaneous prognostications,” contains twelve entries. These are forms of divination already listed in the bibliographic catalogs and encyclopedias (glyptomancy, seal divination, the casting of divining blocks and the sorting of ominous stalks, *lingqian* 靈籤), but also several other cleromantic methods and, somewhat unexpectedly, spirit possession (*jiangshen* 降神) and popular prophecies (*minyan* 民謠). The inclusion of spirit possession and popular prophecies in the traditional classifications of mantic arts is unique. Since we are facing a dictionary of practices and not a bibliographic catalog or an encyclopedia, which, in addition, was written at the end of the twentieth century by historians and anthropologists, we may assume that the editors of the dictionary tried to be comprehensive, without explaining the reasons for their editorial choices.

184 For entries on divination in different versions of the *Wanbao quanshu*, see Smith, “The Cultural Role.” See also Bréard, “Knowledge and Practice,” 316–17; and Bréard, *Nine Chapters*, chapter 6, for the use of divination procedures in entries on mathematics.

185 See *Zhongguo fangshu da zidian*, “Xu” (Introduction), 7–19.

Western observers of customs and ways of life in both rural and urban areas at the end of the imperial period and during the Republican era, have not failed to highlight the prominence of divination at all levels of society. In his *Recherches sur les superstitions en Chine* published between 1911 and 1938 on the basis of material collected at the end of the nineteenth century in the Beijing region, Henri Doré has established a classification of mantic arts in two groups.¹⁸⁶ On the one hand, the group “Fortune-tellers, divination and omens” that comprises eleven different methods, and we find there the casting of divining blocks, the sorting of ominous stalks, glyphomancy, and coin-tossing divination (*qianbu* 錢卜),¹⁸⁷ next to more sophisticated techniques such as horoscopy and hemerology. On the other hand, there is the group of “Vain observances” for the almanacs and topomancy. Even if Doré’s idea might have been to distinguish between popular and learned divination, he does not explain the arrangement of his classification in two groups, nor does he mention spirit possession in this context.

Following her fieldwork conducted in 1975 in the district of San-hsia near Taipei, Emily Ahern has suggested a well-argued classification of forms of divination practiced by the inhabitants of the region and more generally in the North of Taiwan. She, too, distinguishes between two groups of mantic methods: “One set of divinatory methods should be described as interpersonal in the sense that they are explicitly understood as efforts to communicate with the gods. Another set of methods do not involve forms of communication with sentient beings as a central feature; instead they are concerned with understanding forces and processes that operate in the world.”¹⁸⁸ Topomancy, horoscopy, almanacs for hemerology, physiognomy, and glyphomancy are placed in the second group. With the exception of glyphomancy, we find there techniques that were classified in the bibliographic catalogs and encyclopedias among the six major mantic systems. Note that both calendrical astrology and divination by the *Changes* are missing. Could it be that these techniques were not practiced ostensibly in the regions studied by Ahern?

As for the first group defined as “interpersonal divination,” it is represented, on the one hand, by four cleromantic procedures: divining blocks, coin tossing, ominous stalks, and “bird biting lots” (*niaozhan* 鳥占);¹⁸⁹ and, on the other

186 Doré, *Researches into Chinese Superstitions*, vol. 4, chapter 7, 321–79; and chapter 8, 381–416.

187 On this form of divination, see Ahern, *Chinese Ritual and Politics*, 49; and Smith, *Fortune-Tellers*, 117–19.

188 Ahern, *Chinese Ritual and Politics*, 45; and Smith, *Fortune-Tellers*, 244.

189 The “bird biting lots” method is performed by using trained birds to pick up cards placed by the diviner on a table in front of the client; see Ahern, *Chinese Ritual and Politics*, 49.

hand, by spirit-writing divination (*fúji* 扶乩) and mediumnistic vaticinations (*tongji* 童乩). The distinction between Ahern's both groups is not unproblematic. The fact that a method such as the sorting of ominous stalks is used as a medium of communication with the spirits, almost always in temples and places of worship, does not alter its fundamentally cleromantic nature. Examples where the sorting of ominous stalks is used in a non-religious context are numerous, and, as Ahern emphasizes for the case of divination by the *Changes*, the boundaries between the interpersonal and non-interpersonal dimension in casting a hexagram are sometimes blurred.¹⁹⁰ The same applies both to spirit-writing which was performed within a highly systematized environment, and to the vaticinations of mediums (*tongji*) or shamans (*wu* 巫) whose prophetic utterances represented only part of their activities within the local community to which they belonged. I shall close by emphasizing that in encyclopedias such as the *Tushu jicheng*, spirit-writing is not listed among divinatory practices in the "Yishu" (Arts and techniques) section, but rather in the following one named "Shenyi" 神異 (Spirits and the strange). This shows that the practice of spirit-writing, just as the activities of mediums and shamans, was considered part of the domain of customary religion rather than as belonging to the "Shushu" category of mantic arts.¹⁹¹

Of a different scale is the work undertaken by the historian Richard Smith in his *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers: Divination in Traditional Chinese Society* (1991). This book is a first attempt, and the only one to date, to provide an account of the phenomenon of divination in late imperial China in the perspective of a "total social fact." Drawing on all available sources – official histories, local monographs, encyclopedias, writings of Chinese scholars and Western missionaries, travel literature, and direct observation – Smith takes the reader into the daily experience of the empire's inhabitants and reveals the ways in which these indulged in divination and professed opinions about it.

The book contains an introductory chapter followed by five chapters, each dedicated to a particular domain of mantic arts. Although not a classification as such, the groupings undertaken by the author draw a fairly comprehensive picture of the most widely spread practices of divination at the time. Chapter two ("Orthodox Cosmology in the Qing") is a presentation of the cosmological background of the mantic arts: trigram and hexagram symbolism, magic squares, five agents, astrology, omens, the calendar and its hemerological applications. Then, we have chapter three ("The *Yijing* in Qing Society") dealing with divination by the *Changes* and a large variety of *Changes*-related

190 Ahern, *Chinese Ritual and Politics*, 57.

191 See Smith, *Fortune-Tellers*, 261.

mantic techniques such as coin tossing and “Plum Blossom” calculations (*mei-hua shenshu* 梅花神數); chapter four (“The Ways of Wind and Water”) is on topomancy in practice and as a social phenomenon; and chapter five (“Reading Fate”) on horoscopy, physiognomy, glyphomancy, and prophetic verses such as *Tuibeitu* 推背圖 (Chart of extrapolation from the back) and *Shaobing ge* 燒餅歌 (Baked pastry song). Finally, in the last chapter of the book (“Spirit Mediums and Spirit Messages”) Smith has brought together a set of methods and practices that he carefully distinguishes from the others by paraphrasing George Orwell’s famous formula: “All forms of Chinese divination were spiritual, but some were more spiritual than others.”¹⁹² As seen in Ahern’s work and also in the dictionary for divination and occult knowledge by Chen Yongzheng mentioned earlier, Smith introduces at the same level as body omens, divining blocks, ominous stalks and oneiromancy, spirit possession and spirit-writing divination.

From now on, we can see elements that were not accounted for in bibliographic catalogs and encyclopedias until the end of the eighteenth century interfering in the classifications of mantic arts. These classifications are mainly the outcome of modern research in anthropology and social history.¹⁹³ Not that forms of spirit-inspired divination did not exist in ancient times. On the contrary, they are attested in multiple accounts and anecdotes recorded in the bibliographies of diviners and occult specialists (*fangshi*) of official histories, in collections of *mirabilia*, controversies between Confucian scholars, and in Buddhist and Daoist literature.¹⁹⁴ As these sources do not mention the existence of technical writings on spirit-inspired divination, it comes to no surprise that no single trace of it can be found in the bibliographic treatises. Yet, the oral dimension of these practices does not explain everything since the daily-life encyclopedias, which are more open to the social realities of their time, equally fail to mention them. We nevertheless have to credit the bibliographers of the Han for having conceived, within the “Shushu” division, a subdivision specially intended for methods and practices that were qualified as *za* (miscellaneous, various). They thus bequeathed to posterity a sufficiently vague and malleable space, which, in the end, has allowed to integrate into the

192 Ibid., 221.

193 For recent anthropological approaches to the study of divination, see the chapter by Stéphanie Homola in the present volume.

194 For a preliminary survey of books on divination in the Daoist Canon, see Kalinowski, “La littérature divinatoire.” On spirit-mediums and spirit possession in Song China, see Davis, *Society and the Supernatural*, chaps. 5–8; and Bikir, “Divination et destinée,” chap. 2, 191–205. See also the chapters on Buddhism and Daoism in the present volume.

classification of mantic arts forms of divination previously kept at distance for their religious dimension and heterodox nature.

5 Conclusive Remarks

From this overview of attempts to classify mantic arts in imperial China emerges a strong impression of continuity. The bibliographers, and following in their footsteps the encyclopedists, have done their utmost to cope with the categories defined under the Han by Liu Xiang and Liu Xin, adapting them to the social and intellectual conditions of their time.¹⁹⁵ In the second part of this chapter devoted to the *Book of Han* bibliographic treatise, I have emphasized the ideological and institutional factors which led Liu Xiang and his son to the classification of written knowledge into six hierarchically arranged divisions. The first place was given to intellectual writings represented by the canonical texts, schools of thought, and literature, followed by the technical writings, with the military art division, the “Shushu” (Numbers and techniques) division on astral sciences, mathematics and divination, and the “Fangji” (Recipes and skills) division on medicine, the arts of longevity and immortality cults. The decision to classify mantic arts in the same category as astral sciences and mathematics not only granted a legitimate status to divination, it also brought to the same level, without however merging them into one, the investigation of natural phenomena and the interpretation of portentous signs – provoked, perceived or calculated – with the goal to predict their impact upon the destiny of individuals and human collectives. This decision resulted in a de facto exclusion of all kinds of divination that did not respond the criteria put forward by Liu Xiang and Liu Xin.

The evolution of the classification of mantic arts, as it takes shape in the bibliographic catalogs and encyclopedias examined in the two latter parts of the chapter, can be summarized in three points. First, a tendency to dissociate divination from astral sciences and mathematics. A phenomenon already well established under the Song through the catalog by Zheng Qiao, in which the six “Shushu” subdivisions from the *Book of Han* are reduced to two classes, one dedicated to astral sciences and mathematics (“Stars and calculations”), and the other to divination (“Five agents”). This rupture will be completed under the Qing since meteoromancy, included by Zheng Qiao in the “Stars and calculations” class, is carried over to the branch of mantic arts in the *Siku*

195 For a comprehensive history of research related to the *Book of Han* bibliographic treatise, see Fu, *Hanshu “Yiwen zhi” yanjiu*.

catalog. The authors of the catalog have named this latter branch “Shushu,” picking up again, in inverted form (“Techniques and numbers”), the terminology introduced by Liu Xiang and Liu Xin, just as if they intended to signal by this reversal the past achievements from the Han to the Qing in clarifying the relation between the practice of science and that of divination. In conjunction with this evolution, the place given to the *Changes* within the mantic arts has steadily increased in scope, to the point that under the Qing the Classic has been, as was shown, promoted as the philosophical foundation and source of legitimacy of all forms of divination.

Second, the work undertaken by bibliographers led them to reflect upon the very nature of the knowledge and the techniques that they were about to organize. The more their modes of classification took shape, the more their typologies of divinatory arts became refined and explicit. Between the Six Dynasties and the Song, we witness a deconstruction of the typology that underlies the six subdivisions of the “Shushu” division in the *Book of Han* catalog, to the point that Zheng Qiao has preferred to limit himself to a classification of the 1,014 writings contained in the “Five agents” class in thirty types, without trying to group them in larger categories modeled or not on the relevant subdivisions from the *Book of Han* (see table 4.9). Under the last dynasties, the movement is reversed and the tendency is now to regroup divinatory techniques in a reduced number of major systems. During the first half of the eighteenth century, the *Tushu jicheng* encyclopedia distinguishes six main types: divination by the *Changes*, horoscopy, physiognomy, topomancy, hemerology, and calendrical astrology (see table 4.12). The *Siku* catalog written shortly after does not depart from the rule. In spite of differences in the terminology and the related arrangement of subcategories, we find the same six major systems, with the addition of meteoromancy (*zhanhou*), which had been classified by the authors of the *Tushu jicheng* in a separate section (see table 4.10). It is important to note that these six or seven major systems do not, strictly speaking, constitute a typology founded upon clearly stated criteria, as I have tried to do for the threefold classification of divinatory manuscripts from the Warring States, the Qin, and the Han. What we have here is rather an ad hoc nomenclature, which took shape over a long period of time on the basis of the model established in the *Book of Han* bibliographic treatise. Understanding its genesis ultimately depends on whether this historical depth as well as the external factors – institutional, cultural, and social – that have contributed to its elaboration are taken into account or set aside.

Finally, between the beginning and the end of the empire, the classification of mantic arts tends to free itself from official institutions in charge of divination and to become a popular occupation. While remaining profoundly

faithful to the political and moral values of Confucianism, bibliographers and encyclopedists progressively adopt a more open attitude towards the world around them. This is evidenced by the classification of the major mantic systems in the *Siku* catalog, and even more clearly in the *Tushu jicheng* encyclopedia. In this latter work, divination by the *Changes* and by *Changes*-related methods occupy the first position whereas in the *Book of Han* bibliographic treatise precedence is given to astrology and meteoromancy classified under the first subdivision ("Heaven patterns") of the "Shushu" division, and to hemerology and calendrical astrology ranked in the third subdivision ("Five agents"). Likewise, physiognomy and topomancy advance to the top group in the *Tushu jicheng* whereas they are reunited in a rather confuse way in the last subdivision ("Morphoscopy") of the *Book of Han* catalog.

Another indicator of this new awareness is the growing presence of forms of divination that are smaller in scope but very widespread, such as glyphomancy, oneiromancy, the casting of divining blocks, the sorting of ominous stalks, and so on. Confined within the categories of "Miscellaneous prognostications" or "Various skills" by the bibliographers and the imperial encyclopedists, these minor forms of divination acquire in the daily-life encyclopedias a status comparable to that of the major systems. In those writings meant for a large audience, entries on divination are listed one after the other without a clear-cut difference in ranking. This gives a more balanced view of the range of techniques available on the market for those who wish to rely upon them, either by themselves or via a specialist. The fact that the authors of popular encyclopedias do not mention spirit-writing and spirit possession in entries on divination shows that they considered these practices as unrelated to the domain of mantic arts, and that, after all, they, too, remained liable to the classificatory paradigms inherited from the *Book of Han* bibliographic treatise.

All classifications take on a reductionist dimension, to the extent that the one who draws up a classification necessarily operates, due to his intellectual and doctrinal background, a partial division of the reality that he wants to describe. The adage that "a map is not the territory it represents" invites us in a very accurate way to not confound one thing with its representation. But, no matter how rudimentary it is, a map turns out to be useful when one ventures onto unfamiliar territory. This is what I have tried to do in the present chapter: trace the path taken by successive generations of scholars and intellectuals to account systematically and analytically for the diversity of forms of divination practiced in Chinese culture and society.

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Prophecies and Prognostication

Stephen R. Bokenkamp

Our survey of the nature and roles of prophetic fortune-telling in the traditions of China will be comprised of the following sections:

- 1) the problem of “prophecy” in China, surveying how it was described and where it was recorded;
- 2) the poetic idiom, exploring particular linguistic and rhetorical aspects of prophecy in China, and
- 3) longer prophecies.

1 The Problem of Prophecy in China

Cicero’s (106–43 BCE) *De Divinatione* is without doubt the most influential statement on divination methods. In book two, he puts in the mouth of Marcus the following description of Quintus’ “two kinds” of divination that are the object of their discussion. While Cicero will refute the utility of both kinds, the division itself has endured, though not the valuation placed on it by the Stoics:

You divided divination into two kinds, one artificial and the other natural. ‘The **artificial**,’ you said, ‘consists in part of conjecture and in part of long-continued observation; while the **natural** is that which the soul has seized, or, rather, has obtained, from a source outside itself – that is, from God, whence all human souls have been drawn off, received, or poured out.’

Under the head of **artificial** divination you placed predictions made from the inspection of entrails, those made from lightnings and portents, those made by augurs, and by persons who depend entirely upon premonitory signs. Under the same head you included practically every method of prophecy in which conjecture was employed. **Natural** divination, on the other hand, according to your view, is the result – ‘the effusion,’ as it were – of mental excitement, or it is the prophetic power

which the soul has during sleep while free from bodily sensation and worldly cares.¹

Much can and has been written about these distinctions. Here I want to emphasize only that the “natural” is privileged over the “artificial.” The artificial is conjecture plus observation; its methods, according to Cicero’s account, rely on the outer and the conjectural. The natural finds its source in the divine, which is described as inspiring the mind and soul, whether the recipient is a special medium or an ordinary person whom the gods inspire only during sleep. Cicero, of course, employs logic against both methods, but the distinction must have been widely enough held that he honors it in his refutation.

The division made by the Stoics aids us in delineating our project, since it roughly coincides with divisions made in China. “Artificial Divination” corresponds to *shushu* 數術 (calculations and techniques).² Since early times, manuals were produced instructing diviners – and even the wider literate populace – in the employment of these methods. This is particularly true of hemerological arts.³ The mantic techniques that fall under the heading of “natural divination,” which we will call “prophecy,” found no home in the bibliographic classifications of early China. Rather, they are to be found scattered in collections or the histories under the types of practitioners who specialized in the art (e.g. “occult technicians” (*fangji* 方技) or “religious techniques” (*daoshu* 道術)) or under generic classifications that also include artificial divinatory techniques (e.g. “five phases” (*wuxing* 五行) or “verifications and responses” (*zhengying* 證應)).⁴ Even late imperial collections that set out to collect prophetic texts do so for their literary, political, or historical import rather than as a distinct type of mantic technique.⁵ It will thus not be the task of this chapter to collect prophecies or, more impossible yet, to provide a “history” of

1 Cicero, *On Divination*, 400–2. The two kinds mentioned here occur in book two, 26 and 27. I want to thank Professor Philipp Balsiger for discussing these two books with us in the reading group of the International Consortium for Research in the Humanities in Erlangen. Problems of interpretation are my own.

2 See Kalinowski, “Introduction générale,” 11–20.

3 See Harper and Kalinowski’s introduction to *Books of Fate and Popular Culture*, esp. 4–9.

4 Treatises on portents in a few of the histories are also good sources. It would require an essay twice as long as this one to work out the reasons for these classificatory decisions.

5 The best example of this is Du Wenlan’s 杜文瀾 (1815–1881) *Gu yaoyan* 古謠諺 (Ancient prophetic ditties), which includes over 3300 prophetic poems from around 860 sources dating from earliest times through the Ming dynasty. Notably absent, though, are religious scriptures.

prophecy in China. Rather, this general introduction to the subject will survey types of prophecy in China and hopefully provide some guidelines for future research into the subject.

Prophecy will here be defined, as it is usually in Western scholarship, as “pronouncements made on behalf of a god or gods that are meant to foretell the fate of individuals or groups.” As Cicero’s example suggests, dreams were also considered to be prophetic in many ancient and Western traditions.⁶ This was the case in China as well. I will not survey dream data here, though, since it is even more widely dispersed and fractious than other types of prophecy.

But there are other complicating factors that make this definition not quite accommodating enough for the Chinese case, especially during the periods under consideration here, from the Han Dynasty (207 BCE–220 CE) down to modern times. That is because, beginning in the fourth century BCE, Chinese civilization underwent something of a rationalist revolution. As Mark Csikszentmihalyi has observed:

While the Shang addressed their ancestors under the collective name Shangdi, and the Zhou reportedly perceived the workings of a personified *tian* all around them, writers in the fourth century saw an increasingly impersonal *tian* and explained changes in the observable world as the effect of one object on another that was related to it according to a set of correlative schemata. In the case of Chinese divination practice, this entailed a move from divination in the strict sense (i.e., practice that assumes a divinity) to omenology.⁷

Omenology would fall under the heading of “artificial divination” in the terminology presented by Cicero. It involves conjectures made as the result of reading premonitory signs. As Csikszentmihalyi also notes, however, this change in worldview did not entail the total erasure of anthropomorphic deities. The “correlative cosmology” of traditional Chinese thought sometimes ascribes to the cosmos itself a role much like that of a supreme deity and one that, in fact, was often seen as controlling lesser deities. As a result, heaven was seen to “speak” through natural phenomena, which themselves were sometimes seen as controlled by deities, such as the Wind Uncle, Thunder Sire, or various star gods. Not only public venues, such as imperial and regional cults, but domestic spaces as well were seen as the province of numerous spirits, demons,

⁶ See Manetti, *Theories of the Sign*, 19–43.

⁷ Csikszentmihalyi, “Severity and Lenience,” 115–19.

and ancestral emanations.⁸ The reading of such omens was also regarded as a knowledge that could be taught, a science of correspondences rather than divine inspiration. Thus, there are treatises in the histories and manuals to be consulted in the reading of such things as comets, miraculous plants, cloud formations, etc.⁹

In *this* chapter then, I will, insofar as possible, include only those mantic utterances for which we can infer that a deity was held to have spoken in words through or to a human medium. But even this distinction is sometimes difficult to make. Take the following two anecdotes:

1) In the second year of the Eternal Peace reign (260) of Sun Xiu 孫休, he assembled the hostage princes for an entertainment when a strange youth suddenly appeared and said “The three Lords weeded out, what shall happen to the Sima?” He also said “I am not human. I am the star Sparkling Deluder.”¹⁰ When he finished speaking, he rose into the sky. Looking up, [the observers] saw something that looked like a trail of white silk which soon disappeared. Gan Bao (d. 336) said: “Four years later, Shu fell (263); six years later Wei crumbled (266), and twenty-one years after this event, Wu was conquered (280).”¹¹

孫休永安二年，將守質子羣聚嬉戲，有異小兒忽來言曰：「三公鋤，司馬如。」又曰：「我非人，熒惑星也。」言畢上昇，仰視若曳一匹練，有頃沒。干寶曰：「後四年而蜀亡，六年而魏廢，二十一年而吳平。」

2) Teaching of the Celestial Master (rhymed):

Now, for this reason, I send down my teachings and compose these seven-word verses;

Announcing to all Libationers, and all male and female citizens:
Heaven and earth are in chaos,¹² their *qi* like smoke;
The four seasons, the five phases, shift in their progressions.
When heaven and earth merge, there are no people,

8 See Bujard, “Daybooks.”

9 While he does not make the distinctions I am attempting to establish here, Sun Yinggang’s 孫英剛 discussion of the roles of portents in social and political life is excellent. See Sun, *Shenwen shidai*, esp. the comparative introduction, 1–31.

10 The translation “Sparkling Deluder” for the byname of Mars and “Grand White” for Venus given below are from Schafer, *Pacing the Void*, 212.

11 Fang Xuanling et al., *Jinshu*, chap. 28, 843.

12 *Hunji* 混籍 appears to be a *hapax legomenon*.

The starry chronograms fall into disorder as a precursor for humanity.
 In the twenty-eight lodgings, net and triaster¹³ –
 Sparkling Deluder and Grand White emerge between them.
 If there are to be changes, images are hung in the skies as omen –
 The Foundations of Great Peace [my followers?] must not sleep.
 This would lead to unspeakable difficulties.¹⁴

今故下教作七言。謝諸祭酒男女民。天地混籍氣如烟。四時五行轉相
 因。天地合會無人民。星辰倒錯爲人先。二十八宿畢參辰。熒惑太白
 出其間。若有改變垂象先。太平之基不能眠。是令輾軻不可言。

In the first anecdote, Mars (“Sparkling Deluder”) is personified as a young boy who descends to utter cryptic lines that foretell the fall of the three kingdoms and the establishment of the Sima imperial line who will call their kingdom the Jin. Clearly, it is a god who speaks, despite the fact that the anecdote is recorded in a sober, secular history. In the second, a poem from a religious source – the Daoist canon – the speaker can only tentatively be identified as a deity. We conclude that he is the third Celestial Master, Zhang Lu 張魯 first because this rhymed prophecy is appended to a longer circular that appears to be in his voice, and, second, because the speaker of the poem does things that humans cannot do. Specifically, later in the poem he describes his movements as follows: “I tread *qi* to the eight reaches of space; circle once and again, to observe my people ...” This sort of cosmic roaming has a long tradition in Chinese religious writing and is certainly something no human can accomplish.

The following data, then, will include material for which the speaker might not be clearly identified, but seems to be a deity or an ascended sage who speaks from the beyond. In each case, I will clarify my reasons for thinking that the speaker is a god. In some cases, the speaker will be possessed (*fushen* 附身) by a deity; in others, the medium for the message a god delivers will act as scribe, recording the words a god delivers.

The first example, as I mentioned, is recorded in a standard history, the *Book of the Jin* (*Jinshu* 晉書). It is listed in the “treatise on five phases” under the heading *shiyao* 詩妖, the “poetic uncanny.”¹⁵ The second example comes from

13 The two lunar lodges *bi* 畢 and *can* 參 mark the western extremities.

14 This is my translation, first presented in Bokenkamp, “The Heptasyllabic Poetry.” Another translation is to be found in Kleeman, *Celestial Masters*. 143–45.

15 *Yao* 妖 denotes things or entities considered “unnatural” or “monstrous,” with a hint of their being “bewitching” or “enchanting.”

a diachronic collection of Celestial Master Daoist writings, the *Zhengyi fawen tianshi jiaojie kejing* 正一法文天師教戒科經 (Ritual texts of Correct Unity: Scripture of precepts and codes, teachings of the Celestial Master). Much of the scholarship that has been done on Chinese prophecy has centered on anecdotes that, like my first example, are collected in the standard histories. But there are a number of prophecies that appear in different kinds of sources. The books of China's major religions, Buddhism and Daoism, provide many unstudied examples.

Since so much work has been done on prophecies included in the histories, it will be well to give a preliminary account of the sorts of prophecies that appear in such sources:

First, the prophecies appearing in the standard histories are largely political in nature. That is to say, they involve the fates of large houses, prominent political figures, or dynasties.

Second, these appear primarily in the sections on the "five phases" and "astronomy," since a number of the prophecies contain astronomical proofs, as do the two anecdotes above. Connected to the doctrine of the "mandate of heaven," the idea that the fate of governing individuals and entities was literally written in the stars is an old one.

Third, given the nature of these sources, it is likely that they cite only the most relevant portions of what was once a longer prophecy. Above, I have given eleven lines of a thirty-two line Daoist prophetic poem, while the prophecy to which I compare it (item #1) as cited is only two three-character lines in length. In general, prophecies appearing outside of the official histories, whether in religious texts or other sorts of accounts, are much longer and more complex than those given in the histories. I will cite one example that is an entire scripture in length.

Fourth, most of the prophetic poems in the *shiyao* 詩妖 section are presented as *yao* 謠 or *tongyao* 童謠.¹⁶ Such verses, often short and very cryptic, are included in the treatises on "five phases" or "astronomy" but we also find them in the annals or biography sections of the histories where they presage the rise and fall of individuals and dynasties.

Fifth, the name *tongyao* (youth chant) is particularly revealing.¹⁷ Scholars have pointed out that political prophecies in imperial China were often a way

16 Other names include *lingyu* 靈語 (spirit speech), *yuyan* 預言 (predictive words), *shiyao* 詩謠 (poetic chant), *chen* 讖 (augury), *chenyao* 讖謠 (chanted augury), and *shichen* 詩讖 (poetic augury).

17 Wu Qi'nan 吳其南 has estimated that something like two-thirds of the prophecies concerning disasters and political matters recorded in the standard histories are "youth chants." See his "Tongyao yu chenwei," 12.

to incite popular opinion and to spread new ideas.¹⁸ Enmeshed in a social structure that made the airing of complaints about the ruling house difficult, dangerous, and even deadly, the actual authors of prophecy, and particularly the type known as “youth chants” or the “poetic uncanny,” desired to remain unknown. Instead, their verses are attributed to “youths,” women, or wild men. These were people considered unable to hold complex political ideas and so the verses they spontaneously uttered must come from Heaven or from the gods.

When we can identify the mechanism by which prophecies came to be recorded in texts, we find that there are in general four methods:

- 1) Direct revelation. In this case, the medium goes into a trance-like state and often, through voice and gesture, indicates that a deity has inhabited their body (*fushen* 附身). Typically, mediums in this state in some measure become the god. They do not remember the words they have passed on, which are recorded by observers.
- 2) Direct transcription or automatic writing. Related to direct revelation, this method requires that the medium transcribe the words of the gods directly. Usually, this method involves a sort of shorthand and, indeed, there is strong evidence that Chinese cursive scripts were developed and popularized in connection with Daoist mediums’ need to quickly note the conversations of their gods.¹⁹
- 3) Planchette or spirit writing (*fuji* 扶乩, *fuluan* 扶鸞). This method usually involves two individuals, holding a two-handled stylus, who are driven by a deity to swiftly draw characters in a shallow box of sand. The actual message is transcribed by observers who take down the words of the god. This method seems to have only arisen in the tenth century and is said by current practitioners to be superior to direct revelation in that it is conducted in a ritual setting at set times and is available to outside observers.²⁰
- 4) Dream transmission. Gods are also reported to have appeared in dreams and to have used the occasion to warn humans of future events. While this method is usually passive, there are sometimes buildings attached to Chinese temples even today for dream incubation.

18 See Kushida, *Chūgoku kodai no “yō” to “yogen,”* 26–27; and Xie, *Zhongguo chenyaowenhua yanjiu*, 6–9.

19 See Ledderose, “Some Taoist Elements.” This article also includes pictures of Chinese planchette practice.

20 See Kleeman, *A God’s Own Tale*, 8–19.

When we are presented with a revealed prophecy, it is often difficult to determine just how it came into being unless the text itself tells us. For a period of time, for instance, scholars believed that Yang Xi's texts were received by planchette.²¹

2 The Poetic Idiom

Worldwide, poetry is the medium of prophecy. It is only reasonable that higher beings, when they do deign to speak with us, would frame their messages in the most exalted of human media – poetry and song. This is one of the ways that, in the words of John Leavitt, “mantic speech is marked speech.”²²

Just as in the Greek world, the roles of poet and seer were increasingly differentiated over time, but there are signs in the literary tradition that still attest to the prophetic power of poetry.²³ We see this, for instance, in the passage on poetic inspiration from Lu Ji's 陸機 (261–303) *Wen fu* 文賦 (Rhapsody on literature):²⁴ The writer, who “stands in the center and surveys [all] with dark vision” (佇中區以玄覽) begins the creative process with a mystical journey in meditation: “Completely retracting his vision and turning his hearing inward / He is absorbed in thought, searching all around – / His essences cavorting to the eight extremities of space; / His mind roaming thousands of leagues ...” (皆收視反聽。耽思傍訊。精驚八極。心遊萬仞。)²⁵

The reasons that poetry was regarded as the language of the gods are linguistically identifiable. Poetry was, in early times, always rhymed. Words that rhyme seem to be connected semantically. In fact, they may be members of the same word family as defined by Bernard Karlgren and other linguists. These semantic links can, however, be obscured or erased by linguistic or orthographic change, only to be brought out by later writers. When such linguistic connections are revealed by the poet or mystic, they seem avenues into the hidden natures of things. Take for example a gloss on the word *xian* 仙 in a Daoist text: “Now when we speak of Transcendents, it means ‘to transfer;’ that

21 See Stein, “Un exemple de relations entre Taoïsme et Religion Populaire,” 79–90.

22 Leavitt, “Poetics, Prophetics, Inspiration,” 7.

23 For a linguistically informed description of this transformation in ancient Greece, see Nagy, “Ancient Greek Poetry, Prophecy, and Concepts of Theory,” 56–64.

24 Lu Ji, “Wen fu,” 350.

25 Lu Ji cites phrases from the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* that had been adapted by many later mystics to represent their own manners of roaming though contemplation. For a concise analysis, see Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, 87–98. This translation is my own.

is the gradual transfer from ordinary mortal to Sage” (夫言仙者，遷也自。凡至聖之漸也).²⁶ Although this particular example is put into the mouth of a god, it is no different than the paronomastic glosses used by early Chinese literary scholars themselves in probing the semantic boundaries of words. In this case, the word 仙 (*sian, Transcendent) is not only nearly homophonous with 遷 (*tshian, to transfer), the graph itself was sometimes written 僊.²⁷

A related technique often employed in prophecy is “double-entendre,” a technique that should not be confused with paronomastic superimpositions. For example, perhaps the most frequently cited prophecy, that the “Hu would cause the loss of the Qin 亡秦者胡也,” was represented as a double entendre.²⁸ The phrase had been presented to the first Qin Emperor, Ying Zheng 嬴政 (259–210 BCE), as part of a text with charts by one Lu Sheng 盧生 after what was apparently a séance. As a result, Ying Zheng launched campaigns against the Hu peoples. The later scholar Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200 CE) claimed that it was a double-entendre because “Huhai was the name of the second-generation leader of Qin [under whom the kingdom actually fell]. The Qin [ruler] saw the charts and writings and did not know it was a person’s name, so he made preparations against the Hu peoples” (胡亥，秦二世名也。秦見圖書，不知此為人名，反備北胡).²⁹

Prophetic verse liberally employs metaphor as well, including synecdoche and metonymy, to hint at the unseen connections between things and events. Subtle manipulations of metaphorical relationships account for a good bit of the perceived mysterious, riddling, or allusive nature of prophetic language. Parallelism, for instance, is a way of elucidating the temporal connections between “events that are hidden from the present time ... whether lost in the past or belonging to an uncertain future.”³⁰

But the nature of the Chinese language, with its numerous homophones, and of Chinese orthography, with written characters often composed of parts that may stand for other words representing quite different concepts, physical objects, or pronunciations, lead to a number of additional sorts of wordplay

26 *Taishang dongxuan lingbao benxing suyuan jing*, 12b.10. It was, in fact, this passage – and a few others – that convinced me to translate 仙 as “Transcendent” rather than “immortal.”

27 Reconstructions of archaic and middle Chinese found in this paper are taken from Pulleyblank, *Lexicon of Reconstructed Pronunciation*.

28 See Sima Qian, *Shiji*, chap. 6, 252–53.

29 See Xie, *Zhongguo chenyao wenhua yanjiu*, 40–41. Kushida Hisaharu delves into the incident at great length and finally proves that Zheng Xuan was wrong. Ying Zheng’s attacks against the Hu took place before he could have seen the prophecy (Kushida, *Chūgoku kodai no “yō” to “yōgen,”* 230).

30 Tedlock, “The Poetics of Time,” 80.

that lend themselves to mystification. Thus, in addition to homophony, Chinese prophetic texts often employ the method known as *chaizi* 拆字 (breaking apart characters) both to reveal hidden connections and to disguise the true subject of certain statements.³¹

From the standpoint of the recipient, these techniques might be regarded as elements of a “code” that signals the presence of prophecy and suggests that the poetic text stands in need of skillful interpretation.³² From the side of the composers of such poetic prophecies, the techniques provided anonymity and a certain amount of deniability. At the same time, they tended to make the prophecies seem inevitable, part of the inherent nature of the cosmos.

To demonstrate this, there is no better source than the prophetic verses forwarded to Li Yuan 李淵 (r. 618–26), founder of the Tang Dynasty, by Pei Ji 裴寂 (560–619) and other officials as they participated in the ritual dance whereby the officials of a reluctant conqueror urge him thrice to take the throne.³³ These are recorded in the unique eye-witness account of the uprising written by Wen Daya 溫大雅 (ca. 527–649). These verses make reference to nearly every celestial sign or augury that attended Li Yuan’s seizure of power. Because of this, Wen’s account can be used to decipher references that would otherwise be lost to us.³⁴

Take, for instance, the first of a series of five poems or fragments of poems attributed to an otherwise unknown “spirit person” (*shenren* 神人) in Li Yuan’s home base, Taiyuan, by the name of Hui Hua Ni 慧化尼.³⁵

Eighteen Children of the Eastern Seas,	東海十八子
Eight wells summons the Three Armies.	八井喚三軍
In his hands he holds a pair of white sparrows;	手持雙白雀
On his head he wears purple clouds.	頭上戴紫雲 ³⁶

31 For some examples of this technique as used in prophetic texts, see Xie Gui'an, *Zhongguo chenyao wenhua yanjiu*, 99–105.

32 The term “code” (*daima* 代碼) to account for these linguistic features is introduced by Xie, *Zhongguo chenyao wenhua yanjiu*, 7.

33 The following data on Li Yuan’s portents is derived from Bokenkamp, “Time After Time,” 77–87.

34 On the importance of Wen Daya’s account for the history of this period, see Bingham, “Wen Ta-ya,” 368–74.

35 Wang Qinruo et al., *Cefu yuangui*, chap. 894, 31b, gives one line of a prophecy from this deity dating to around 560, the early days of the Northern Zhou. This time, the deity is said to be from Ye 鄴. The number of prophecies in support of the Tang founders that derived from the Northern Zhou Martial Thearch Yuwen Yong 宇文邕 (r. 561–78) is probably worth investigating.

36 Bokenkamp, “Time After Time,” 77.

There are two deconstructed characters in the first two lines. “Eighteen children” are the graphic elements that make up the surname Li 李, “Eight Wells,” together with “three,” the given-name Yuan 淵.³⁷ That his given name meant “watery abyss” connected him with the Daoist Sage of the Latter Heavens, Li Hong 李弘, the savior whose appearance to gather in the Daoist *electi* was to usher in the end of the old world age and the beginning of the new.³⁸ The “Three Armies” of the Tang uprising were led by Li Yuan’s two sons, Jiancheng 建成 and Shimin 世民, and the third by Pei Ji. On July 23, 617, the day after Li Yuan had appointed his three generals, a white sparrow was captured and presented by a monk whose lay surname was Li. That afternoon, another white sparrow came to rest on a tree in front of Yuan’s standard. For the next three mornings, a purple cloud in the shape of a dragon or tiger was observed to hover over his residence. Purple is the imperial color and the color of the center of heaven.

Verse #3 contains metaphors of ascent and stellar approbation, a disassembled form of the surname Li 李 and, in the final couplet, a paronomastic rhyme:

From the northwest, heavenly fire reflects on Dragon Mountain.	西北天火照龍山
The youth’s red beams link with the Dipper.	童子赤光連北斗
The youth hangs a white banner atop a tree.	童子木上懸白旛
Hu soldiers spread about, before and behind;	胡兵紛紛滿前後
Clapping their hands, they sing “tang-tang”	拍手唱堂堂
And chase sheep that flee to the south.	驅羊向南走 ³⁹

A youth 子 with a tree 木 on top spells once again the surname 李. White was initially the color of the Tang and also of the white-robed Maitreya figure who, like the Daoist savior Li Hong, was to appear at the end of an old world age and the beginning of a new one. The Li family, as Turks, were likely Hu themselves. But the homophony occurs with the song *tang-tang*, “Grand! Glorious!,” which is a reduplication of a word pronounced the same as the word that is the name

37 This latter graph is a bit trickier: 三 = the water radical and an inverted 八 over 井 approximates the right side of the graph. Dunhuang Daoist scriptures dating to the Six Dynasties and Tang periods regularly employ graphic variants similar to

潤

For 淵 see Ōfuchi, *Tonkō Dōkyō mokurokuhen*, 396. Li Hu 李虎 (d. 551), Li Yuan’s father, himself wrote the graph in a similar fashion. See Liang et al., *Zhongguo shufa da cidian*, 696.

38 See Seidel, “The Image of the Perfect Ruler,” 216–47; and Bokenkamp, “Time After Time.”

39 Bokenkamp, “Time After Time,” 78.

of Li Yuan's fiefdom and the eventual name of the dynasty he will begin, the Tang 唐. The phrase also has the advantage of referring obliquely to the *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of songs) poem Mao #204 "Shang-shang zhi hua 裳裳之華," which is also sometimes written *tang tang zhi hua* 堂堂之華, and was traditionally held to praise an officer worthy of replacing an evil ruler.⁴⁰ The word for sheep *yang* is homophonous with the surname Yang 楊 of the ruling house of the preceding Sui dynasty whose last representative, Yang Guang 楊廣 (r. 604–18), did indeed flee south of the Yangzi River. The parallelism of the last two lines connects the cheering Hu soldiers and the fact of the emperor's flight, making it seem as if their enthusiasm alone will send him running. Metaphorically, a rising action on the part of the Tang is juxtaposed with a centrifugal action on the part of the Sui ruler.

Another feature of Chinese language and thought that distinguishes Chinese prophecy is the way time was expressed in pre-modern China. Due to the sexagesimal system for marking days, months, and years, time was seen both as flowing linearly and as moving in cycles. The practical effect for prophecy, though, was again a measure of deniability. If an event did not occur as foretold, perhaps it was actually due to occur in sixty days', or sixty years', time hence. Take the second of the five poems of Hui Hua Ni, which begins:

Dingchou together with *jiazi*,
He hid away, entering the hall.
Why does he sit in the hall?
In the center is the child of heaven.

丁丑與甲子
深藏入堂裏
何意坐堂裏
中央有天子⁴¹

The two time designations could refer to years, months, or days. Fortunately, Wen Daya's account allows us to determine that this verse refers to June 23, 617, the fifth day of the fifth lunar month of the *Dingchou* reign-year, when Li Yuan outwardly broke with the Sui by imprisoning two Sui officials. Had the event occurred sixty or even one hundred twenty days later, the prophecy would still seem accurate.

In fact, on occasion we find evidence that Chinese did attempt such recalculations. The Daoist medium Yang Xi 楊羲 (330–386?) received from his gods the information that the Sage Li Hong would arrive to usher in the apocalypse "within the space of forty-six *dinghai* years" after the reign of sage-king Yao.⁴² Yang and his cohort calculated that the end would come in their lifetimes,

40 See the comments of Zheng Xuan in Ruan Yuan, *Shisan jing zhushu*, chap. 1, 479c.

41 Bokenkamp, "Time After Time," 78.

42 See Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 345 for a translation of the entire prediction.

in 387. It did not. Then, as Michel Strickmann writes, Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536), the man who collected Yang’s manuscript legacy,

could not help considering the sage’s kingdom as still to come. Furthermore, Tao was himself a renowned expert in matters of chronology and accordingly had his own definite opinion on the dates of Yao’s reign. Its initial year, he states, was a *wuxu* 戊戌 year just 2,803 years prior to this cyclical year *jimao* 己卯 of our Qi dynasty [=499 CE]. Thus, *dinghai* 丁亥 would correspond to the fiftieth year in Yao’s century of rule (and such a calculation would also ensure that there could be only a single *dinghai* year in that long reign). We can see that, according to this interpretation, the crucial forty-sixth *dinghai* year was to fall in 507.⁴³

That is to say, Tao Hongjing, too, managed to mathematically put himself in the direct path of the grim reaper who would come in only eight short years.

One final aspect particular to Chinese poetry, shared with cognate languages, is the poetic use of rhyming, alliterative, or reduplicated descriptive binoms. These are words formed of two distinct words, like “teeny-weeny” or “flurry and fluster.” The number of such compounds in Chinese is much greater than in European languages. Their meaning is not always determined by the constituent graphs, which sometimes represent only sounds. The auditory effect of such words is, in fact, key to their poetic attraction. Still, they are, as David Knechtges has shown, a translator’s nightmare, though he does devise reliable means for construing their meaning. In the end, the translator must treat the binom as an independent word and collect examples and commentaries on those examples to determine meaning. The examples Knechtges presents are 1) **dam-dam*, written 澹澹, 澹淡, and 淡淡, descriptive of something that pitches and rolls, or bobs up and down in water, and, in the context of his sample line describes an ill person who “shivers and shakes;” and 2) **guang-duang*, written 虹洞, 鴻洞, 鴻洞, descriptive of things that “mingle and merge,” whether water, sounds, or lines of chariots.⁴⁴ An example of the use of such words in prophecy is provided in the final section of this essay.

This brings us to a consideration of one of the primary qualities of poetry, its auditory effects. In the prophetic texts we have been considering, this aspect is entirely lost to us. We can approximate the pronunciation of ancient poems through historical linguistics, but the performative aspects of such verses are

43 Strickmann, “On the Alchemy of T’ao Hung-ching,” 153–54.

44 This excellent discussion on the topic of binoms and how to deal with them is found in Knechtges, *Wen Xuan*, 2–13.

buried in the sands of time. Contemporary accounts of Chinese mediums can only give us some notion of what we had lost. David Jordan has described the utterances of Taiwan mediums as “sometimes a series of unintelligible mutterings.”⁴⁵ Even native informants sometimes have a hard time understanding their speech, but attest that “it resembles poetry.”⁴⁶ We learn that the voices of various gods are differentiated; that mediums sometimes take on the voices of the dead, that they “wail” or “sing” in keening voices, and that the singsong qualities of some resemble the singing of Chinese opera.⁴⁷ Lawrence Scott Davis has shown how “classical sounding” poetic phrases, singing, infantile banter, glossolalia – indeed all sorts of language effects shading off to non-linguistic utterances – mark the otherness of the trance and the presence of the divine.⁴⁸ But, despite the efforts of the ethnographers, the details of any specific pre-modern performance are lost to us.

3 Longer Prophetic Texts

When modern scholars turn to longer examples of prophecy, the most commonly cited works are, first, the *weishu* 緯書 or “apocrypha,” texts that appeared during the Han dynasty and, second, popular texts such as the *Tuibei tu* 推背圖 (Nudging Charts), attributed to Li Chunfeng 李淳風 (602–670) but actually composed later and anonymously.⁴⁹ Both sorts of text, while important, are difficult to study. Not only are they impossible to date, their authorship is likely multiple and totally unknown. The former is comprised of a number of texts that were banned at an early date and are now imperfectly reconstructed.⁵⁰ The *Tuibei tu* is a collection of sixty simple, but mysterious pictures, associated with the sexagesimal cycle and each accompanied by two

45 Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors*, 76.

46 Cline, “Female Spirit Mediums,” 532.

47 Ibid., 524–26; Mu, “The Invisible and the Visible,” 350–55; Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, 30–31. See also Wolf, “The Woman Who Didn’t Become a Shaman,” 419–30.

48 Davis, “The Eccentric Structure of Shamanism,” 198–203. Davis also gives numerous examples.

49 See Xie, *Zhongguo chenyao wenhua yajiu*, 242–337. Xie’s view of the date and provenance of the text appears *ibid.*, 329–31.

50 The *weishu* or “weft” texts have been reconstituted from a variety of sources in the six volumes of Yasui Kōzan 安居香山 and Nakamura Shōhachi 中村璋八, *Isho shūsei* 緯書集成 (A collection of weft texts). For studies of these texts, see Dull, “A Historical Introduction,” esp. 183–235. Excellent studies have been done on individual influences of the weft texts. See particularly Lu, “Apocrypha in Early Medieval Chinese Literature,” 93–101; and Raz, “Time Manipulation in Early Daoist Literature.”

couplets of three to seven character lines entitled “the chant” (*yao* 謠) and two couplets of “hymns of praise” (*song* 頌) in seven-character lines. These two snippets of verse are both rhymed. The first pictures and their poems are clearly *vaticinium ex eventū*, lending credibility to the predictive capabilities of the later entries in the text. Usually ignored, however, are the longer prophetic texts associated with China’s translocal religions. In the following section, we will turn to some examples of this sort of prophecy.

It might seem that Buddhist texts would not fit the definition we have set of prophecy as entailing revelation from a deity. Buddhist scriptures are defined as words “spoken by the Buddha.” But, of course, Buddhists did attribute words to the Buddha, producing a number of “apocryphal” *sutras*.⁵¹ Eventually, and, it seems, particularly in the Chinese cultural sphere, authors began attributing their newly-appeared *sutras* to revelation.⁵²

The Buddhist revelation literature that might be called “prophetic” is largely political in nature.⁵³ Erik Zürcher has traced the gradual recasting of Buddhist ideas in China that resulted in a sort of messianic belief centering around the future Buddha, Maitreya. Scriptures began to appear predicting the cleansing of the central kingdom and the coming of an age of great peace under Maitreya as early as the late fifth century. But there were other messianic figures as well, including one who might deliver those who upheld Buddhist practice to Maitreya’s Tusita heaven while inaugurating a period of revival on earth under an enlightened ruler. This was the “obscure Bodhisattva” Yueguang tongzi 月光童子 (Skt. Candraprabha-kumāra, Eng. Prince Moonlight).

Several prophetic scriptures feature Prince Moonlight. The *Foshuo fa miejin jing* 佛說法滅盡經 (The scripture of the complete obliteration of [Buddhist] practice), portrays Prince Moonlight as descending to inaugurate a 52-year restoration of Buddhism before the inevitable period of decline sets in.⁵⁴ But the scripture that centers on him most closely is the *Shouluo biqu jing* 首羅比丘經 (Scripture of the Monk Shouluo) found in a number of Dunhuang copies. Zürcher describes language found in this text as “so cryptic as to defy all attempts to understand it,” but he derives aid from the metaphors found in another long apocryphal text, the *Zhengming jing* 證明經 (The scripture of verification), cited in support of the usurping empress Wu Zhao and studied

51 The bibliography on apocryphal Buddhist scripture is large and growing. Consult first Buswell, *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*.

52 On this question, see first of all Campamy, “Buddhist Revelation,” 1–21.

53 Erik Zürcher provides features that contributed to the sort of eschatological thought that came to fruition in China. See his “Prince Moonlight,” 6–10.

54 A summary of the text is provided in Zürcher, “Eschatology and Messianism,” 48–50.

by Antonino Forte.⁵⁵ Zürcher provides a paraphrase of the *Shouluo jing* and recounts the many ways that its imagery matches the apocalyptic literature of Daoism. On this matter of the end times, as well as the pressing question of which of many contestants would emerge to unify China under sagely rule, the two religions were in close competition and traded symbols and metaphoric language freely.

One of the Daoist scriptures that Zürcher mentions as similar to the *Shouluo jing*, the *Taishang lingbao tiandi yundu ziran miaojing* 太上靈寶天地運度自然妙經 (The most high Lingbao self-actualizing wondrous scripture of the cyclical movements of heaven and earth, hereafter *Scripture of Cyclical Movements*), is part of the corpus of original Lingbao scriptures released in the first decades of the fifth century. While it rivals the *Shouluo jing* in unintelligibility, a few of the images repeated throughout the text hint that it may have been intended to provide support for Liu Yu 劉裕 (363–422), perhaps around the time of his campaigns in the north and eventual capture of Chang'an (417).⁵⁶ The particular scriptural references in the verses play up the Lingbao scriptures and seem to reach out to Celestial Master adherents who might not yet know them.

Rather than providing further hypothetical reconstructions of the circumstances under which these two texts were composed, it will best serve our present purposes to notice how the *Shouluo jing* and the *Scripture of Cyclical Movements* function as prophecy.

In opening these works, we notice that both texts contextualize with a lengthy narrative scaffolding the prophetic phrases we have seen presented with minimal context in the histories and in other standard collections. The *Shouluo jing* begins with the story of the monk Shouluo's encounter with five hundred Transcendents who call him Prince Moonlight. The *Scripture of Cyclical Movements* opens as what appears to be a treatise on the cycles of time, only becoming oracular within the verses that eventually appear. It is apparent too, that in giving adherents portions of the text to memorize and recite, both texts ensure their propagation to a larger audience. The overly articulated and dire warnings of flood, fire, and warfare also ensure that their messages will be heeded and the paragons they foretell will be well-received. The way in which they are written also provides for a good measure of deniability. The opposite side of that coin is that they require interpretation and provide ample room for it. The *Shouluo jing*, for instance, gives the names of nineteen "worthies" (*xian* 賢) who are hidden away in the world, but will reveal themselves when the time has come. When the names are listed, they turn out

55 Forte, *Political Propaganda and Ideology*, 271–80.

56 See Bussio, "Signs, Signs, Everywhere a Sign."

to be common surnames with given names that are also fairly normal. That is to say, they are easily adaptable to the actual names of living persons who might want to take on the role.⁵⁷ The *Scripture of Cyclical Movements* is particularly interesting in this regard. Not only does it give names that might be decoded, it also provides place names that might refer to actual spots where those who received the scripture or heard about it could gather for safety. Some of these reappear in the *Shouluo Scripture*, indicating that authors of such prophecies influenced one another across sectarian lines.⁵⁸ Finally, we should not neglect that fact that such prophetic scriptures, though longer than many of the examples we have examined above, made for relatively compact scrolls and present themselves as holy objects to be carried on the person. Both texts further stipulate that they should be practiced, visualization meditations in the case of the *Shouluo jing* and chanting in the case of the *Scripture of Cyclical Movements* – just the opposite of what we would expect from a Buddhist and a Daoist text respectively. That these texts are to be publicly displayed also somewhat belies the cost of the *Scripture of Cyclical Movements* as given in its appendix – five ounces of gold and one hundred feet of brocade with a red ground – which was probably added expressly to make the contents seem valuable.

Daoist scriptures of all periods are full of prophetic passages and we know that a number of eminent Daoists served as advisors both to imperial and elite families. Unfortunately, while political prophecies could be recycled for reasons we deduced, individual prophecies were particular and occasional in ways that ensured they would disappear with the death of the principles. The

57 Some examples are Shi Xiande 石賢德, Yan Xianming 嚴賢明, and Sun Xianqi 孫賢奇 from one list and Qin Chaoshi 秦超世, Fan Daocheng 潘道成, and Lu Huiyuan 盧惠顯 from another. The first eight all share the graph for “worthy” and the latter eleven have suggestive names like “Qin who transcends generations.” See *Shouluo biqu jing*, 1356c.20–28.

58 The most common name, spelled out in several ways, is Liu 劉, referring to the ruling family of the Han dynasty and their descendent, Liu Yu, who sought to restore it. So, for instance, the critical verse eight has the lines 卯金無傷人。刀曲不覺痛。 Which means, roughly, “Mao gold will not harm people / The blade is bent so one does not feel the pain.” This spells out the surname Liu and, I suppose, would be comforting if a general by that name were marching into your vicinity with an army. (*Taishang lingbao tiandi yundu ziran miaojing*, 4b.4–5.) Verse two has a reference to the world floods where the mulberry fields turn into an Eastern Sea: “When the Eastern Seas roam the mulberry fields / it is best to enter a blessed spot / where the eight stones can refine your physical form. Willow City is a place of life / Where [flood] dragons are quelled and will not tarry.” (東海桑中遊。宜先入福地。八石以鍊軀。柳城即生地。伏龍不為悠。) (*Taishang lingbao tiandi yundu ziran miaojing*, 6a.6–7.) Zürcher notes that Willow City, along with the place name Yangzhou 揚州, appear in both scriptures considered here as a place of refuge. (Zürcher, “Prince Moonlight,” 42, fn. 77.)

only exception to this seems to be the revelations of Yang Xi 楊羲, the Daoist medium who we encountered with regards to the prophesied arrival of the Sage Lord and whose transcripts of his vision were collected by Tao Hongjing. Yang served the family of the minor Jin dynasty official, Xu Mi 許謐 (303–373?). The transcripts of his midnight conversations with the Perfected beings included individual predictions for members of the Xu family as well as those of larger social import.

In the case of Yang Xi, we are more certain how he communicated with his gods. Tao, in his postface to his collection, calls the revelations of the Perfected “announcements delivered orally, similar to Buddhist scriptures that all announce ‘the Buddha said’” (眞誥者眞人口授之誥也。猶如佛經皆言佛說).⁵⁹ Further, the revelations themselves portray the gods who descend to Yang asking him to write out their revelations, a fact he dutifully records. When, on one occasion, likely prompted by questions among the Xus as to why the beautiful texts Yang brings from his meditation chamber each night are in his own handwriting, Yang timorously asks the goddess why she never writes anything. He is once again asked to write out the reply. (It turns out that celestial calligraphy is too exalted for debased humans to see, much less read.)⁶⁰

Among the prophecies found in the extant writings of Yang Xi and identified by Tao Hongjing, we will mention only the Daoist version of a Buddhist *shouji* 授記 (Skt: vyākaraṇa, “prediction of future Buddhahood”).⁶¹ In Yang Xi’s revelations, as in Daoist texts more generally, the individual prediction is called *shoulu* 受錄 (receive registration) and involves a prediction of one’s future rank in the heavens. Tao Hongjing notes that Xu Mi 許謐 (303–373?) and his son Xu Hui 許翺 (341?–370?) received their registrations in the second year of the Grand Harmony 泰和 reign-period (367–368).⁶² This is also the basis of the death dates he assigns to them.

Dank and dragging Elder,⁶³
 Depressed and dejected, though bright within.
 Discard the ties of the past
 And your form will no longer be as before.
 Shake off, purify, refine –
 This is the nature of obtaining the Dao.

59 *Zhen'gao*, chap. 19, 2a5.

60 *Zhen'gao*, chap. 1, 7b7–10a3. For more on the question of celestial writing, a subject we have scarcely broached here, see Hsieh, *Tianjie zhi wen*.

61 Zürcher, “Prince Moonlight,” 8.

62 *Zhen'gao*, chap. 19, 4a5–6.

63 See Hawkes, *The Songs of the South*, 284.

Bring spirits and heart into harmony;
 Raise cloudy numina to flower forth.
 Incline to view the morning scene –
 The sound of virtue is fragrant as thoroughwort.
 Now, reaching the tenth year,
 Jiwei nominates one.
 Everything urges one forward –
 Do not be less than diligent!

納納長者。蔚蔚內明。撥于昔累。非復故形。變扇澡鍊。得道之情。
 和挹神心。仰秀雲靈。傾觀晨景。德音蘭馨。方及十載。季偉舉名。
 每事勗焉。勿復不精。

By this time, Xu Mi would know that Jiwei was the personal name of the second of the deified three Mao brothers, the Certifier of Registers (Dinglu jun 定錄君), Mao Gu 茅固. This was the appropriate deity to be making promotions and the use of his personal name meant that Xu Mi had joined the elect. Xu Mi's culture and education would have alerted him to the significance of the reference to the classical *Chuci* 楚辭 (Songs of Chu) that describes him, as well as providing the simile of virtue as being like sweet-smelling flowers. He would understand that he was being described as failing in his quest for transcendence and was being urged to do better. What he could not have guessed is the significance of the ten years. Fortunately for Xu Mi, Yang Xi also channeled the gloss that the revealing deity, the Perfected of the Grand Prime (Taiyuan zhenren 太元真人) and elder of the three Mao brothers, Mao Ying 茅盈, had to say on the meaning of this announcement.

Now, by the *bingzi* year (376) it will be [the start of] ten years [from now]. At that time, you will be 72 sui. So by the *hai* (375) or *zi* year, your spirits should transform and be refined. Beginning with the *zi* year, it will exceed the ten years [limit].

到丙子年爲十年矣。時當七十二也。到亥子年。神化變鍊。子年始餘十年。

According to family records, Xu Mi died in 373, but Tao Hongjing rejects this date in favor of that predicted by the Perfected of the Grand Prime, stating "Now I take the Perfected One [=the True One] to be correct" (今以眞爲正).⁶⁴ Here we have a god deciphering the prediction given by another god.

64 *Zhen'gao*, chap. 20, 8b9–10.

Perhaps the most important word used by the gods to describe Xu Mi's fate is the word in the first line that portrays him as the "Dank and dragging Elder" (*nana zhangzhe* 納納長者). The binom *nana* 納納 is very uncommon, being used most prominently in the last line of a stanza from Liu Xiang's 劉向 (77–6 BCE) "Feng fen 逢紛" (Encountering Troubles), where it is glossed "damp, saturated."⁶⁵ The entire stanza would have been called to mind by this image. David Hawkes translates: "With looks all leaden and ravaged over, / With spirit broken and aged with time, / With a skirt that flapped, bellying in the breeze, / With robe dragging heavily in the dew" (衣納納而掩露). This opening image sets the tone for the rest of the prophetic verse, which relates how Xu Mi might, through spiritual striving, rescue himself from the ravages of time to achieve the predicted goal.

Interestingly, the gods must have been recently perusing the *Chuci*. The registration poem for Xu Mi's son also opens with a binom, this time an alliterative one, deriving from the same work: **Siaw-thiaw* 蕭條斧子 (Little axe). "Axe" or "Jade Axe" (*yufu* 玉斧) was the youthful name of Xu Hui used only by his family and the deities. **Siaw-thiaw* 蕭條 is a very common atmospheric binom which Knechtges translates "desolate and deserted" in landscape descriptions.⁶⁶ Paul Kroll, in his dictionary, translates "drear and cheerless, barren and bleak, quiet and calm, decaying and desolate, lone and forlorn," all of which are connotations of the word in different contexts.⁶⁷ It seems that the term is onomatopoeia for wind blowing through a desolate, deserted landscape.

The most appropriate use of the term in this prophetic context is once again the *Chuci*, this time the piece on Transcendent visionary travel, "Distant Roaming" (*yuanyou* 遠遊). After arriving at Nanchao 南巢, where he encounters the legendary Transcendent Wang Ziqiao 王子喬, the persona of the poem travels around the southland, where he enjoys the company of – and receives sustenance from – other ascended beings. Here the landscape is described as follows: "The mountains are quiet and deserted (*xiaotiao* 蕭條), lacking beasts, / The wilds are lone and desolate, without humans at all."⁶⁸ Given this textual depth, it almost diminishes the pronouncement the gods make on Xu Hui by translating the line. Xu Hui, we are to understand, has achieved perfect

65 See Hong Xingzu, *Chuci buzhu*, 283.

66 See Knechtges, *Wen Xuan*, 2:125, for example.

67 See Kroll, *A Student's Dictionary*, 301.

68 Hong Xingzu, *Chuci buzhu*, 168. Hong cites Wang Yi 王逸 (89–158), who glosses *xiaotiao* as *jiliao* 寂寥 (still and remote). My translation of this line thus differs from David Hawkes' "forlorn" (Hawkes, *The Songs of the South*, 196) and from Paul Kroll's "drear and cheerless." (Kroll, "An Early Poem of Mystical Excursion," 160). I think that the point here is the complete otherness and difficulty of access of this hard to reach place.

stillness. Lone and undisturbed, he is ready to embark on the next stage of a journey that will take him from the earthly plane.

It may seem strange to the modern reader that the two men are described in terms appropriate to damp clothing (Xu Mi) and an unpopulated landscape (Xu Hui). It may also appear odd that the gods cite so closely the classics of the Chinese literary tradition. But we have perhaps seen enough of the allusive nature of Chinese prophetic verse not to be surprised by these facts. Prophetic utterances in fact often derive much of their force from the depth of the culture from which they grow.

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The above explorations barely touch upon the literary richness of Chinese prophetic literature. There a great number of unstudied texts and more are being produced every day. Much of it is, by its very nature, occasional and evanescent, disappearing soon after it appears. For example, while I have not spent more than two or three days a year in Chinese temples over the last thirty years, I possess three prophetic verses addressed to me personally, one each by Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓, Ma Tianxian 馬天仙, and Jesus Christ 耶穌基督. All were delivered by planchette – the first two in Chinese and the latter in English – while I observed. This, perhaps, can indicate something of the vitality of the tradition.

Abbreviations

- DZ *Daozang* 道藏, numbers following Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen, eds., *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang* (*Daozang Tongkao* 道藏通考). 3 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- T. Taishō shinshū daizōkyō 大正新脩大藏經 [Revised Tripitaka of the Taishō (period)]. Edited by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭. 85 vols. Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–34.

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Divination and Its Institutionalization in Pre-modern China

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In pre-modern China, divination or prognostication, on the one hand, was used to predict benign and pernicious affairs, social chaos, dynasty renewal, and changes within nature.¹ On the other hand, as popular folk culture, it also had a profound impact on the socio-cultural life of the common people, and was used especially to cope with difficulties, disasters, disease, and frustration. In such situations, people would resort to a variety of methods to pray for protection from the gods (*shen* 神) or ask diviners for guidance. Universal as these types of adversity are, divination in pre-modern Chinese society evolved into a popular practice for both the nobility and the poor, from emperors to officials to laypeople. This universality also resulted from the widespread faith in destiny as well as the acceptance of an “interaction between heaven and humans” (*tianren ganying* 天人感應). These doctrines are reflected in some proverbs of pre-modern China, such as “Life is determined by fate, and wealth is determined by heaven” (*rensheng you ming, fugui zai tian* 人生由命，富貴在天) and “If something is in your fate, you will always receive it, [but] if something is not in your fate, do not force it” (*mingli youshi zhongxu you, mingli wushi mo qiangqiu* 命裡有時終須有，命裡無時莫強求). These sayings, to a large extent, reflect the traditional Chinese sense of destiny, which exerted an enduring influence. In addition, belief in supernatural powers and doubts about human agency also played a role.

This chapter will trace the historical evolution of divination in relation to the changing cultural and social environment of pre-modern China. It also explores the growing institutionalization of divination and the related practices. I will start by indicating four of the main institutional and social factors: the promotion of divination by the emperors and ruling elites, the study and

1 Unlike Western history, the history of China is less conveniently divided into “ancient” and “medieval” periods since much of the Chinese cultural traditions that existed during the age viewed by Westerners as the “middle ages” were simply a continuum of ancient practices. In this paper, the study of divination in China from 221 BCE to c.1800 CE is placed within a broad time frame, including several different dynasties of pre-modern China.

elaboration of divination by prominent scholars, the popularization of divination among the general populace, and the influence of Buddhism and Daoism. The following sections will outline the evolution of pre-modern Chinese divination according to the timeline of historical dynasties. The changes in divination within each dynasty will be summarized mainly in terms of the above four factors in order to evaluate the historical evolution and practice of divination, especially in relation to the official astrological institutions existing in pre-modern China.

1 Overview of Institutional and Social Factors

To understand the institutional setting of Divination in pre-modern China, we must consider a number of important characteristics. Firstly, divination was usually advocated by those in power. That is to say, divinatory activities in pre-modern China were often implemented at the state level. Many historical documents provide evidence that the state or its officials would resort to divination to ascertain the divine will, especially when faced with natural or man-made disasters, sudden changes in the environment, and severe threats to life. Divination offered a means of rationalizing these phenomena, which seemed beyond humans' rational capacity, and also of formulating policies for their management. We may also assume that the emperor's engagement in divination was a powerful driving force behind its popularization. This is why we should pay attention to the political connotation of ancient Chinese divination activities.

Due to the prevalence of divination at the state level, from the Shang Dynasty (c.1600–1046 BCE) throughout the imperial period, full-time officials were assigned to observe the changes in heaven and on earth, and study the mechanism of Yin 陰 and Yang 陽 in order to conjecture about the fate of the state. The officials in charge of divination attained considerable social status, and were sometimes comparable to the important officials surrounding the emperors. After the Han Dynasty (202 BCE–220 BC), the functions of the divination officials were assigned to the Prefect Grand Clerk (Taishi ling 太史令) or special celestial officials (*tianguan* 天官), who oversaw the management of Heaven (*sitian* 司天).² In the ranking system, the positions of these officials could be relatively low, but their capacity allowed them to play important political roles. Because they appeared as the spokespersons of heaven or the gods,

2 Shi and Wei, "Zhongguo gudai tianxue jigou," 3.

their words were often assumed to indicate “the will of heaven.” These officials have always appeared as interpreters of various signs, advisers of emperors and aides to military and political officials at all levels. They participated in formulating the royal etiquette regulations and various legal religious activities of the country, as well as being responsible for arranging religious activities and establishing theories to rationalize these actions.³ As the will of heaven was difficult to predict and not accessible to all, this gave them considerable power and even the emperors had to respect these officials’ announcements.

In pre-modern China, every emperor regarded himself as the son of heaven (*tianzi* 天子), being legitimized by his status and perceived as acting on behalf of heaven. The institution of officials in charge of divination was also designed to signify that the ruler was complying with the heavenly will. However, emperors set up divination officials not to restrain their own deeds and policies but rather to shield themselves from criticism by their subjects. The emperors would use divination as a legitimating device under crucial circumstances to prove that their words and deeds were in accordance with the public’s expectations. The institutionalization of officials in charge of divination also signaled the emperor’s advocacy and support of divination. This would certainly have encouraged the lower social classes to engage in divination.

Secondly, eminent scholars often engaged in divination and studied the related theories of Yin and Yang, the Five Elements (*wuxing* 五行), and the Eight Trigrams (*bagua* 八卦). Especially after the *Zhouyi* 周易 (Changes of the Zhou) came to be revered as a Confucian classic, prestigious scholars attached great importance to its study and research. This certainly also sparked the interest of officials or of those who had a close relationship with court politics.

In addition, the Imperial Civil Service Examination System, which started during the Sui Dynasty (581–618), was also an indirect institutional factor that contributed to the spread and popularity of divination. The system unprecedentedly opened up a path to officialdom that inspired dreams of a political career among scholars of a lower social status. Hence, many scholars, especially those who felt dissatisfied with their performance in the examinations, began to study their own destiny as much as the actual content of the examinations. They therefore resorted to divination or studied it in order to predict their own fate. Moreover, those lower-status scholars, who had not necessarily been successful in the imperial examinations, nevertheless formed an important social class that served as a link between the common people and the ruling elites.

3 Ma Ke, “Zhanbu, kexue yu zongjiao,” 377–89.

Their enthusiasm and interest in divination, as well as their association with government officials, certainly promoted the spread of divination in society.

Thirdly, divination was in high demand among the common people. This popularity partially derived from the advocacy of upper-level officials and scholars, but there were other factors at play related to popular religious beliefs. In pre-modern China, there was a widespread belief in the power of deities to reward and punish human beings. The importance of religious worship created suitable social, cultural, and psychological conditions for the popularization of divination. The faith placed in the gods was slowly transformed into one in the process and outcome of divination, naturally promoting the popularity of divination across different social classes. The book entitled *Tang liu dian* 唐六典 (The six statutes of the Tang dynasty), a compendium of state offices of the Tang Dynasty (618–907), outlines the policies and regulations related to divination. These show that divination was officially recognized at that time and was incorporated into the officially recognized popular belief system.⁴

Lastly, divination was influenced by the emergence of the institutionalized religions of Buddhism and Daoism. This influence on divination manifested itself in two ways: first, they provided divination with a theological underpinning; for example, Buddhism advocated sincerity toward the Buddha and the accumulation of good deeds to achieve positive results. Buddhist teachings thus conformed with the purpose of divination; namely, to secure a positive fate. The second aspect was the convergence of the suprahuman elements within religion and divination. In order to gain a foothold in China, Buddhism incorporated many elements of Chinese popular religion, including notions related to ghosts and gods, into the translation of Buddhist scriptures and religious practice more generally. In this process, Buddhism adopted many features of divination.⁵ This certainly contributed to the popularity of Buddhism in China.

Daoism is also a faith, in which seeking, cultivating and ascending to immortality are important doctrines. These deities and immortals (*shenxian* 神仙) were credited with special power and their worship within Daoism

4 Song, "Jicheng, gaizao he ronghe," 220–21.

5 For example, the method of astrology in Esoteric Buddhism encompassed the *Xiuyao jing* 宿曜經 (Sutra on the constellations and planets) and *Qiyao rangzai jue* 七曜攘災決 (Secrets of seven-planet apotropaism), which were popular during the Tang period. The former employs the lunar position at individuals' birth to speculate about their personality and destiny, while the latter is based on sophisticated astral science to help people seek good fortune and avoid disaster. See Yano, *Esoteric Buddhist Astrology*. For a comprehensive discussion of the relation between Buddhism and divination, see the chapter by Esther-Maria Guggenmos in this handbook.

allowed its mutual integration with the realm of divination.⁶ Many Daoist deities were incorporated into the theoretical framework of divination, which not only strengthened people's trust in divination but also expanded the influence of Daoism. In fact, the Daoist quest for immortality was consistent with the goal of divination, as it allowed Daoist adepts to understand and communicate with the divine, in order to help people to change their fortune, pray for blessings, and avert misfortune. Divination methods were widely used in Daoism from the late Tang period onward, and many Dunhuang documents show that practices related to auspicious activities played an important role within Daoism.⁷ Therefore, we should note the close relationship between divination and religion. In fact, no ritual can be conducted without divination activities. Divination, therefore, not only played a prominent role in the religious activities of the court, but also spread into Daoism, Buddhism and folk sacrificial rites.⁸

In general, the longevity of pre-modern Chinese divination was mainly due to the drive of the key political figures and institutions of the court, as well as the religious beliefs and participation of a large number of outstanding intellectuals. Under the influence of elite participation, divination further spread to the lower social classes who, in turn, contributed to a growing diversity of divination theories and systems.

2 The Pre-Qin Period: The Preliminary Establishment of Institutions for Divination

If we seek to trace its origin, the ancient practice of divination was originally associated with farming, hunting, sacrifice, war, and many other activities that ensure the functioning of human society. In this context, changes in the natural environment could and did profoundly influence human affairs, while human behavior could also provoke responses that were beyond the limits of human perception. The emergence of divination reflected people's intention to identify laws underlying the rise and fall of states and other historical changes. This indicates an effort to communicate with nature in order to conquer it to some extent. States or tribes would, therefore, designate officials to serve as specialists in divination. In the case of important matters, the ruler,

6 For a comprehensive treatment of the relation between Daoism and divination, see the contribution by Fabrizio Pregadio to this volume.

7 Liu, "Dunhuang zhanbu yu Daojiao chutan," 15–25.

8 Ma Ke, "Zhanbu, kexue yu zongjiao."

seeking an indication from heaven or the gods, would first consult the divination officials before making a decision. He would not decide quickly nor act imprudently until he had received an answer from the gods.

During the Shang Dynasty, all major military issues, natural disasters, health issues, crop production, etc., could be addressed through divination. It provided one way for the elite to determine their actions through destiny and divine instructions. Based on the typology introduced by Michael Lackner in the introduction to this volume, methods of divination can be roughly divided into two categories: one may be termed “intuitive or natural divination” and relies on the mouth of a medium to predict future events; the other, which may be termed “artificial divination,” is based on the observation of signs, including the interpretation of the orientation, size, and number of an object. Shang divination was reactive and opportunistic and never focused on individuals beyond the royal person, his consort, and his officials. The chief interest was affairs of state, such as sacrifices to the royal ancestors, harvests, warfare, illness, etc.⁹

The elites of the Shang Dynasty mainly used tortoise shell and bovine bones, which practices were referred to as “divination by tortoise-shell” (*gui bu* 龜卜) and “divination by bones” (*gu bu* 骨卜), respectively. These practices were controlled by officials such as the court’s Grand Augur (Taibu 太卜). During the early part of the period for which we have oracle-bone records, questions were asked both positively and negatively, allowing the ruler to indicate his own intentions. In the case of an unfavorable outcome, the divination process could also be repeated numerous times. The last nine Shang kings were served by more than 120 diviners. The names of these diviners are unknown but they can be linked to certain lineages and appear to have been of relatively high status. During the later Shang period (after the reign of Wu Ding 武丁, r. ?–1189 BCE), divination became increasingly institutionalized. Instead of the many topics addressed before, such as disease, dreams, and childbirth, divination came to be practiced on fixed days and focused mostly on the performance of the ancestral cult. The results of the divination procedures performed during this period were also always positive.¹⁰

Between the fall of the Shang Dynasty up to the Zhou period in the eleventh century BCE, the status of divination based on shells and bones weakened and became increasingly replaced by divination by alpine yarrow stalks (*shi zhan* 蓍占). This entailed the arrangement and combination of yarrow stalks according to a specific formula to produce a set of numbers that would manifest the

9 Pankenier, *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China*, 6.

10 Keightley, “The Shang,” 237–45.

outcomes of future events. This method was extremely complicated, with a wide range of applications, and almost completely replaced shells and bones as the main divination method during the Eastern Zhou period (ca. 770–475 BCE). It was recorded in the *Zhouyi*, which used images of the hexagrams (*gua xiang* 卦象) for divination.¹¹

During the Zhou period, divination became increasingly complemented by new philosophical concepts, such as the “interaction between heaven and humans” (*tianren ganying*) and “harmony between humans and nature” (*tianren heyi* 天人合一), which indicated a resonance between the conditions in heaven and those on earth. Developments on earth could thus be interpreted based on the conditions of certain stars. This method of divination, based on observation of the sky, came to be called astrology.

During the Eastern Zhou period, astrology became one of the most influential methods of divination. During this period, which was marked by constant warfare and unpredictable political developments, the theory of “field allocation” (*fenye* 分野) was established to explain developments in the human realm by using astrology. The *fenye* theory, as one of the central theoretical paradigms within astrology, divides the belt straddling the ecliptic into twelve parts. Linking these parts with regions on earth makes it possible to relate celestial phenomena to specific regions rather than to the empire as a whole.¹² This theory had a profound impact on the development of astrological divination over the course of history. During the Warring States period (475–221 BCE), astrology was mainly associated with Gan De 甘德 and Shi Shen 石申, the legendary founding fathers of the astral sciences of the Warring States. The works *Tianwen xing zhan* 天文星占 (Heavenly pattern star divination) and *Tianwen* 天文 (Heavenly patterns/writing) are attributed to them respectively, but both of these books are now lost, leaving only fragments preserved in a silk manuscript, the *Wuxing zhan* 五星占 (Prognostications on the five planets), which is a guide to military planetary astronomy/astrology and was excavated from Mawangdui 馬王堆 tomb 3 (sealed in 168 BCE).¹³

Due to their esoteric nature, professionals are required to apply astrological techniques. During the Western Zhou Dynasty (Eleventh cent.–770 BCE), a number of official positions were established to study and take charge of astrology. The blueprint for the Zhou bureaucratic apparatus, the *Zhouli* 周禮 (Rites of Zhou), divides responsibility for the astral sciences into the office of the Observer (Fengxiang shi 馮相氏) and the Guardian of the Rules (Baozhang

11 Shaughnessy, *Unearthing the Changes*, xiii.

12 Pankenier, “Applied Field-allocation Astrology in Zhou China.”

13 Cullen, “Understanding the Planets in Ancient China.”

shi 保章氏).¹⁴ These offices worked together to observe Heaven, to warn the throne of anomalies, to maintain a lunisolar calendar for civil use, and to select auspicious days for state ceremonies.¹⁵ In the Spring and Autumn period, the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (Commentary of Zuo to the Spring and Autumn) also recorded that “the Son of Heaven has Clerk Officers [who are in charge of observations]” (*Tianzi you riguan* 天子有日官), and that these officers were responsible for astrology at that time.¹⁶ The establishment of the astrological clerk office during this period set a precedent that was followed by later dynasties, which established professional astrological institutions and thus gradually transformed the astrological office into a stable institutional feature.

In addition, several other important divination methods were applied during the pre-Qin period: the first was the interpretation of dreams (oneiromancy). Dreams were thought to indicate future events and thus were held to be either auspicious or pernicious, which led to the development of dream divination. Dreams were considered a channel for communication between humans and the gods, wherefore oneiromancy falls into the category of “intuitive or natural divination,” as explicated by Michael Lackner. Dream divination rose in popularity in combination with a number of other factors, such as seasons, celestial phenomena, and Yin and Yang, and was furnished with a more comprehensive theoretical framework.¹⁷ In the Spring and Autumn period, dream divination was usually practiced by the official historians. Knowledgeable officials and nobles were capable of interpreting both their own dreams and those of the king. However, there also existed several non-official and popular religious practitioners who engaged in these practices. The best-known dream diviners were actually of non-elite origin and dream divination was only later incorporated into an official framework.¹⁸

The second important method of divination was related to the emergence of two theories: the “Five Elements” and “Yin and Yang,” mentioned above. Water, Fire, Wood, Metal and Earth form the five *xing* 行, a cluster of powers

14 The *Zhouli*, compiled during the Warring States period, describes the putative organization of the government during the Western Zhou period. In actuality, however, it is certainly a later idealization rather than an actual description of the Western Zhou institutions. See Shaughnessy and Loewe, *The Cambridge History of Ancient China*.

15 Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 3, *Mathematics and the Sciences of the Heavens and the Earth*, 186–94.

16 Xu, *Zhongguo gudai tianwenxue cidian*, 186.

17 Needham and Wang, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 2, *History of Scientific Thought*, 139–43.

18 Liu, *Xingzhan yu mengzhan*, 3–12.

that has been rendered as the “Five Elements.” Chinese people believed that these constituted the basic elements that made up everything in the cosmos. The system of five comprises a phase of production known as “mutual generation” (*xiangsheng* 相生) and “mutual overcoming” (*xiangke* 相克), and was used to describe the interactions and relationships between different phenomena. According to the Warring States period political philosopher Zou Yan 鄒衍 (c.305–240 BCE), the Five Elements can be equated with the so-called conquest sequence of the Five Virtues (*wu de* 五德).¹⁹ Thereby, the cyclic succession of the elements also indicates dynastic transitions. The theory of Yin and Yang is, on the contrary, dualistic and thus able to describe how seemingly opposite or contrary forces may actually be complementary, interconnected, and interdependent in the natural world, and so may give rise to each other through their interrelatedness.²⁰

3 The Qin and Han Periods: The Maturity of Chinese Divination

During the late Warring States period, the theory of Yin Yang and the Five Elements became merged with the concept of immortality. From then on, the art of immortality became more popular, and the number of people experimenting with methods of immortality increased dramatically. Even some emperors were involved in these activities and searched for the mountain of the immortals in the sea in order to find the elixir of immortality.

Legend has it that, after Qin Shihuang 秦始皇 (r. 247–210 BCE) unified the six Kingdoms, he heard that there existed a kind of elixir on the mountain of the immortals in the sea, and immediately sent a group of people to seek this panacea. Xu Fu 徐福 (dates unknown), a “master of methods” (*fangshi* 方士), allegedly went to the sea three times to obtain it for Qin Shihuang but ultimately failed. According to this legend, in order to avoid disaster, he led 3,000 virgins of both genders to the sea and never returned. Instead, he is said to have arrived at the island of Japan, where he settled and founded another promised land. Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty 漢武帝 (141–87 BCE) also attached great importance to these masters and, as a result, divination also received additional attention.²¹

Liu An 劉安 (179–122 BCE), the uncle of Emperor Wu, best known for editing the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (Master Huainan), a compendium of Daoist, Confucian,

19 Asano, *Gudai Zhongguo de yuzhoulun*, 121–28.

20 Zhang, *Xingkong yu diguo*, 85–121.

21 For Xu Fu and divination, see chapter one in Itsuki, *Xu Fu jituan dongdu*.

and Legalist teachings, was keen on divination. The *Huainanzi* was regarded as an encyclopedia of politically useful knowledge from the pre-Qin period.²² One chapter is entitled “Tianwen xun 天文訓” (Instructions on the patterns of heaven), and covers a range of contents including cosmogony, astrology, correlative thought, the geography of the sky, planetary models, and omens.²³ While it includes a narrative on the origin of heaven and earth, significantly, it also explains the relationship between the ruler’s political behavior and the occurrence of irregular disasters and celestial portents.²⁴

Under the influence of Emperor Wu and Liu An, during the Han period, people from different social classes – including influential Confucian scholars – turned to the study of divination and astrology. Building on astrological theories inherited from the previous dynasties, astrology during the Han period underwent significant development, as reflected by the establishment of a central official institution, the Taishi ju 太史局 (Grand Clerk), which comprised hundreds of officials, whose duty was to produce in advance a calendar of the upcoming year and oversee other affairs related to the astral sciences.²⁵

Apart from the political realm, the popularity of astrology led to the composition of many astrological works and the emergence of a large group of astrologers.²⁶ Among them, the influence of Jing Fang 京房 (78–37 BCE), who was an expert in making predictions based on the hexagrams of the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of changes), was the greatest. A book on *Yijing* divination, attributed to him, describes his method of interpretation. Another scholar, Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BCE), who was also a philosopher and politician, is considered to have originated the doctrine of “the interaction between heaven and man.” Dong Zhongshu laid down rules for deciding a monarch’s legitimacy as well as providing a set of checks and balances for a reigning monarch, and apparently favored worship of heaven over the tradition of cults celebrating the Five Elements.²⁷

In addition, it is worth mentioning that the *Zhouyi cantong qi* 周易參同契 (Talisman of the three receptacles based on the *Zhouyi*), one of the early Daoist classics, was written by Wei Boyang 魏伯陽 (c.151–221) during the Eastern Han Dynasty. This book explores alchemy on the basis of images in the *Zhouyi*. It

22 For the *Huainanzi*, see Liu, *Huainanzi*.

23 Major, “Astrology in the *Huai-nan-tzu*.”

24 For this chapter, see Major, “*Huainanzi* Chapter Three.”

25 Morgan, *Knowing Heaven*, 42–44.

26 Zhen, “Lun tianwen xingzhan zai Handai,” 135.

27 Zhang, *Xingkong yu diguo*, 238–63.

is the earliest systematical Daoist scripture on alchemy, and also a very important book related to divination activities.²⁸

4 The Period of the Wei, Jin and the Northern and Southern Dynasties: Divination and Daoist and Buddhist Thought

During the period of the Wei, Jin, and the Northern and Southern dynasties (third–sixth centuries CE), the political landscape was instable, which weakened the state control and enhanced engagement with metaphysical thought. The growing influence of Buddhism and Daoism, which developed during this period, promoted a stronger sense of the self. This background provided opportunities for the development of divination, the focus of which shifted from being used in farming, hunting, sacrifice, war and other major events to the prediction of individuals' fate. The methods, skills, categories, and theories of divination practices also changed accordingly.

One example is divination based on the *Zhouyi*, which began to involve three copper coins, instead of yarrow stalks, to generate a hexagram that can then be interpreted. Interestingly, while the coin-divination technique is first attested in a text from the seventh century, it is usually attributed to the above-mentioned Jing Fang.²⁹ Likewise, animal bones replaced tortoise shells, while the method for explaining fortune slips also emerged. In addition, a number of theoretical works on divination were published, some of which eventually attained the status of classics. Ge Hong's 葛洪 (c.283–c.343) *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 (The Master Who Embraces Simplicity), for example, is a comprehensive work on theories of immortality. This book systematizes Daoist beliefs and combines them with Confucian principles. More significantly, Ge Hong also refers to the relatively sophisticated divinatory arts of Dunjia 遁甲 (Yang wood) and Qimen 奇門 (Strange gates),³⁰ as well as to the use of talismans and the invocation of deities in times of danger, which also occur in the Daoist tradition of Dunjia.³¹

At the same time, after the Eastern Han Dynasty, Buddhism spread to China and left a profound influence on pre-modern Chinese society, thought, and culture. During this period, the methods of divination integrated many Buddhist aspects, especially mantras and Sanskrit Dharani, to which magical

28 For the *Zhouyi cantong qi*, see chapter six in Xiao and Guo, “*Zhouyi cantong qi*” *yanjiu*, and the contribution by Fabrizio Pregadio to this handbook.

29 Nielsen, *A Companion to “Yi Jing” Numerology and Cosmology*, 121–22.

30 Ho, *Chinese Mathematical Astrology*, 83–85.

31 For Ge Hong's views on divination more generally, see the contribution by Fabrizio Pregadio to this handbook.

power was attributed.³² Sanskrit sounds and rhythms were considered to be of divine origin and so untranslatable into Chinese. Consequently, they were annotated with Chinese characters and became secret mantras, pronounced in Sanskrit. Esoteric Buddhists believe that, if one chants a mantra every day, it can control evil spirits and demons, help to master life crises, and cure diseases. The Daoists borrowed these mantras and combined them with other magical figures to produce a type of charm, written in peculiar characters, named *fuzhou* 符咒.³³ After the Eastern Jin Dynasty (266–420), these charms became increasingly sophisticated and difficult to read, and were commonly called “ghost charms” (*guihua fu* 鬼畫符).

Many of the political offices responsible for divination as well as their responsibilities during this period were inherited from the Han period. However, the management of these duties became more professionalized and the division of their responsibilities was clarified. The Wanghou lang 望候郎 (Gentleman Observer) and Houbu li 候部吏 (Official of Watchers) were the officials in charge of divination and astrology, while the Dian li 典曆 (Director of the Calendar) served as the official calendarist.³⁴

5 The Sui and Tang Periods: The Development and Integration of Divination Theories

During the several hundred year period covered by the Wei, Jin, and the Northern and Southern dynasties, divination gained more ground and increasingly flourished. A considerable number of books on divination were thus listed in the “Jingji zhi 經籍志” (Treatise on dynastic bibliographies) of the *Suishu* 隋書 (Book of Sui). In that respect, it not only surpassed the number in the “Yiwen zhi 藝文志” (Treatise on bibliography) of the *Hanshu* 漢書 (Book of Han) (on which, see the contribution by Marc Kalinowski to this *Handbook*), but also introduced changes regarding classification. The *Suishu* retained the category of “astronomy” (*tianwen* 天文), just like the *Hanshu*, with a considerable number of books belonging to the category of astrology and divination. Unlike the *Hanshu*, however, all other types of divination were included in the category of the “Five Elements,” which not only included traditional prognostication techniques, such as physiognomy, *Zhouyi* divination, geomancy, and dream divination, but also contained novel techniques, such as the *liuren*

32 Several Buddhist magico-religious rituals were also accepted by Daoism.

33 For the general history of *fuzhou*, see chapter one in Liu, *Zhongguo fuzhou wenhua*.

34 Chen and Zhang, *Zhongguo gudai tianwen jigou*, 49–68.

六壬 (Six Yang Waters), six kings and nine palaces, wind horns, *wangqi* 望氣, that had become popular since the Han Dynasty. The classification in the “Jingji zhi” of the *Suishu* remained in use in later dynastic histories.³⁵

In addition to the “Jingji zhi” of the *Suishu*, Yu Jicai’s 庾季才 (516–603) *Lingtai miyuan* 靈臺秘苑 (Omen compendia) (c.580; 15/120 *juan* or volumes) also included a summary of works on divination before the Sui Dynasty.³⁶ The first volume of the *Lingtai miyuan* is the well-known “Bu tian ge 步天歌” (Song of pacing heaven), which is illustrated with celestial maps. The “Bu tian ge” was a popular mnemonic poem for Chinese traditional astral constellations, and was considered to be the work of Dan Yuanzi 丹元子 (fl. late seventh century) of the Sui period. Other research, however, indicates that it was, in fact, completed during the early Tang period. The “Bu tian ge” is an introductory book to the study of astronomy and astrology. Even today, people still use it to identify and remember the names of the traditional constellations and their locations that it describes, and it was a masterpiece in this regard.³⁷ Moreover, the “example” part can be considered as containing the essentials of astrology, because it provides a concise summary of many of the astrological works completed before the Sui Dynasty. The compilation of “Tianwen zhi 天文志” (Treatise on heavenly patterns) in the *Suishu* was partly based on this book.³⁸ The officials in the Clerk’s Office of the Song Dynasty (960–1279) revised the *Lingtai miyuan* to make it more concise.

Astrology books became more informative and detailed during the Tang Dynasty. The *Kaiyuan zhanjing* 開元占經 (Divination manual of the Kaiyuan period) was one of the most representative works of this period. Its author was the Indian astrological master Gautama Siddha (Qutan Xida 瞿曇悉達, c.725) who, together with his father, son and grandson, served in the Astronomical department of the Tang Dynasty for four consecutive generations.³⁹ He integrated the western zodiacal system with the traditional Chinese twenty-eight lunar lodges and the duodenary series belonging to the “field allocation” theory (*fenye*). This theory was applied to the fortune-telling chart, thereby enriching the methods of related divination techniques.⁴⁰ According to rough statistics, more than 400 books are cited in the *Kaiyuan zhanjing*, most of which are important ancient books, especially a large number of “weft books” (*weishu*

35 On the issue of the classification of divination practices in the *Suishu*, see also Li and Lackner, “Contradictory Forms of Knowledge?” 457.

36 Xu, *Zhongguo gudai tianwenxue cidian*, 136.

37 For the *Bu tian ge*, see Zhou, “*Bu tian ge*” *yanjiu*.

38 Morgan, *Knowing Heaven*, 25–32.

39 Niu, *Tangdai yuwai tianwenxue*, 2–9.

40 Zhao, *Tang-Song tianwen xingzhan*, 110–27.

緯書) and a variety of books that have not survived. This book is, therefore, highly valuable and has become a treasure house of astrological works before the Tang Dynasty.⁴¹ Following the publication of the *Kaiyuan zhanjing*, however we observe a decline in the popularity and social influence of astrology, which appears to have been in less demand among scholars and other social groups. In addition, astrology gradually began to give way to horoscopy.

The method of horoscopy divides one's date of birth into characters by using heavenly stems and earthly branches, and then calculates one's fate according to one's personal birth information. In the Tang Dynasty, diviners usually took into account the year, month and day of birth. This type of horoscopy was no longer used only to predict the fortune of the state, court or emperor, but was also applied to the fate of individuals and families. The technique is complicated, making it relatively difficult for beginners to learn, which led to the further professionalization of practitioners and the emergence of specific institutions to engage with these activities.⁴²

The most authoritative institution for divination during the Sui and Tang dynasties remained the official astrology department; namely, the Taishi cao 太史曹 (Bureau of the Grand Clerk) that belonged to the Mishu sheng 秘書省 (Palace Library). The Bureau of the Grand Clerk set up official positions, such as the Prefect Grand Clerk and Assistant to the Grand Clerk, and erudite students in charge of astronomy and the water clocks. In the third year of the Daye 大業 reign (607), the Bureau was renamed Taishi jian 太史監, and placed in the hands of the Jian hou 監候 (Marquis Supervisory Officer). Many officials who worked at the institute were responsible for calculating the clepsydra marks and making astronomical observations. Many of them also specialized in astrological divination for the imperial court.

After the year 621, the name of the astrology department in charge of heavenly affairs changed several times, and its affiliation was also reorganized. This department was huge, with more than a thousand employees at its peak during the Tang Dynasty. In 758, the department became independent from the Palace Library and was transformed into an independent institution of the Tang court. This change had a definite impact on its organization during the Song and Yuan, and even the Ming and Qing, dynasties.

In addition, it is worth mentioning that there were many prophetic books circulating during the Sui and Tang dynasties. The most famous of these were the *Tui bei tu* 推背圖 (Massage-chart prophecies), which is attributed to Li Chunfeng 李淳風 (602–670) and Yuan Tiangang 袁天罡 (573–645). Later

41 Sasaki, "Kaigen senkei."

42 Chen and Zhang, *Zhongguo gudai tianwen jigou*, 68–94.

emperors but also leaders of political uprisings often sought to prove their legitimacy based on the prophecies of the *Tui bei tu*. This also led to the creation of various versions. Its political usage also explains why its circulation was usually prohibited by the state and it was only secretly disseminated.⁴³

6 The Song Period: Official Control over the Circulation of Divination among the People

During the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127), divination and astrology played an important role in the political sphere.⁴⁴ As a basic policy, the power over the interpretation of celestial phenomena lay in the hands of the rulers, so that the court could gain a political initiative through astrological interpretations. In order to strengthen the control over astrology, several astrology departments were established during the early Song Dynasty, together with a number of astronomical departments modelled on the former Bureau of the Grand Clerk.

In particular, after the reform of the Yuanfeng 元豐 reign (1078–1085), a separate observatory was established at the Hanlin Academy 翰林院, while the Mishu sheng also launched an Observatory for the Measurement of the Armillary Sphere (Ceyan hunyi suo 測驗渾儀所). Each institution assigned specific staff to observe abnormal celestial phenomena on a nightly basis. These departments, in parallel with the Bureau of the Grand Clerk, not only contained special personnel, but were also equipped with sophisticated astronomical instruments. The establishment of these departments increased the amount of astrological activities, and so provided different options for comparison.⁴⁵

During the early Song period, following the policy of the Tang Dynasty, Emperor Taizu 太祖 (r. 960–976) exercised stricter control over the management of astronomers both inside and outside the court. Alongside the prohibition of the private transmission of astronomical knowledge and the private collection of astronomical objects, a set of strict policies for controlling astrological knowledge and divination was formulated.

This policy was implemented during the Northern Song Dynasty, and assigned different responsibilities to the official astronomers, bureaucrats, ordinary scholars, officials, and common folk. On the one hand, the policies led to the parallel establishment of a department of astronomy at both the Bureau

43 For the study of the *Tui bei tu*, see Wen, “*Tui bei tu*” *yanjiu*.

44 Dong, “*Tianwen xingzhan*,” 56.

45 Zhao, *Tang-Song tianwen xingzhan*, 53–56.

of the Grand Clerk and the Hanlin Academy, and this institutional innovation strengthened the supervision over the observation and reporting of astronomical phenomena. On the other hand, local officials were obliged to control the relevant astronomical books, by either burning them or reserving them for use under the surveillance of the court. Anyone who studied astronomy privately or collected celestial maps would be severely punished. In addition, the common people were encouraged through rewards to expose any prohibited activities. The purpose of these policies was to ensure the court monopoly over astronomical knowledge and prevent its circulation. Unintentionally, this policy resulted in a shortage of astronomical talent during the late Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279), so that the government had to seek proficient astrologers among the common people.⁴⁶

Although popular practitioners of the Song Dynasty lacked the opportunity to study official astrology, they still formed their own distinct school. Their methods of divination were easier to master and increasingly used to predict the fate of individuals. There were four classic genres in particular: the eight trigrams (*bagua*), horoscopy, physiognomy, and geomancy (*fengshui* 風水). By the Song Dynasty, these four types of divination, which had originally been employed in the service of the ruler, had been furnished with a comprehensive set of theories and reliable methods for operation, so that they could become gradually popularized.⁴⁷

Within the realm of popular divination, the most prominent technique was the method of the eight characters, commonly known as counting “eight characters” (*bazi* 八字). As developed by Xu Ziping 徐子平 (907–960), this method was more rigorous and easier to understand than other fortune-telling techniques, which contributed to its popularity. It calculates one’s fate by combining one’s birth time according to the heavenly stems and the earthly branches of the lunar calendar date with the “Five Elements” theory. In distinction from previous methods of horoscopy, the hour of birth was considered as well, resulting in eight characters. This method not only circulated among the common people but also found a home at the imperial court. It has been transmitted ever since, becoming an inseparable aspect of popular divination culture since the Song Dynasty.⁴⁸

In addition, many other popular methods developed at the time, including fortune-telling by inspecting the face, hand, body, bones, and blood.

46 Chen and Zhang, *Zhongguo gudai tianwen jigou*, 98–105.

47 For the practice of divination during the Song Dynasty and the views of the literati, see the chapter by Liao Hsien-hui in this handbook.

48 Ho, *Chinese Mathematical Astrology*, 154–55.

Representative works on this topic are the *Mayi xiangfa* 麻衣相法 (Mayi's physiognomy) and *Shenxiang quanbian* 神相全編 (Complete guide to spiritual observation). As they were easy to use, these methods spread widely and formed the basis of the classical theory of physiognomy in pre-modern China.⁴⁹

7 The Yuan and Ming Periods: The Comprehensive Organization of Divination

Following the establishment of the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), the court inherited the astrological institutions of the Song Dynasty; namely, the Taishi yuan 太史院 (Academy of the Grand Clerk) and Sitian tai 司天臺 (Bureau of Managing Heaven). In 1271, the court further established the Huihui Observatory (Islamic Observatory), which was later renamed Huihui sitian jian 回回司天監 (Islamic Astronomical Bureau), reflecting the growing influence of Arabic and Persian astronomy.⁵⁰ These three departments were specialized astronomical institutions, in charge of the astral sciences, and each had its own responsibilities and focus. Thus, the Taishi yuan was responsible for producing and promulgating the calendar. Both the Bureau of Managing Heaven and the Islamic Astronomical Bureau independently submitted their astronomical observations and astrological interpretations of anomalous celestial phenomena to the emperor in order to compare and compete with each other.⁵¹

The institution for the astral sciences during the Ming period was first called the Taishi jian and renamed Taishi yuan in 1367. The following year, it was renamed Sitian jian 司天監 (Bureau of Managing Heaven). In 1370, it acquired the more awe-inspiring name of Qintian jian 欽天監 (Bureau of Respecting Heaven), which was retained until the end of the Qing period. The Islamic Astronomical Bureau, first established during the Yuan Dynasty, continued to operate until 1398. At that point, the department was suspended and became integrated into the Qintian jian, as a single section called Huihui ke 回回科 (Islamic Department). This section was in charge of making calculations based on Islamic mathematical astronomy, but partially also used Chinese traditional methods. Besides the above-mentioned institutions in Beijing, there was another Qintian jian maintained in Nanjing, the old capital of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). Both institutions were responsible for observing

49 Kohn, "A Textbook of Physiognomy," 227–58.

50 Chen, "Yuan Ming Zhongguo Yisilan tianwen jigou," 61.

51 Chen and Zhang, *Zhongguo gudai tianwen jigou*, 130–39.

abnormal celestial phenomena, calendar-making, astrological interpretations, and observing celestial bodies, so that the officials of both institutions were qualified to use divination to select auspicious dates and decide the location for a building, as well as the optimum times to hold court marriages and funerals.⁵²

Astrology was closely intertwined with the realm of politics – not only institutionally – and several major political events during the Ming Dynasty were related to astrological prognostication. Liu Ji 劉基 (1311–1375), for example, a Confucian scholar and erstwhile supporter of the Yuan Dynasty, joined the forces of the later Ming emperor Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (r. 1368–1398) in 1360.⁵³ He predicted Zhu's eventual emperorship and was favored accordingly. After joining Zhu Yuanzhang's army, Liu Ji also contributed to his successful military strategy. In battle, he often practiced astrological divination for Zhu and also applied his meteorological knowledge to help the Ming Army to defeat their enemy.⁵⁴

Emperor Shizong 明世宗 (1521–1567) was another prominent ruler who devoted himself to divination. He was interested in Daoism, engaged with charms (*fuzhou* 符咒), and gave Daoist representatives favorable political treatment and financial support. He also trusted the predictions of Daoist diviners, even basing promotions and demotions of officials on them. Those Daoists, in turn, are said to have taken advantage of divination to intervene in the administration and influence state affairs.⁵⁵

Due to his interest in divination, Emperor Shizong and many of the senior officials around him promoted the study and editing of astrological works. Due to their efforts, a number of large-scale astrological books with complex contents were completed. The book *Xingxue dacheng* 星學大成 (Great compendium of astral studies), written by Wan Mingying 萬民英 (1522–1603) in 1563 was a typical example for this period. Wan, an official scholar, was skilled in astrology and numerology and, through the compilation of this book, wished to promote orthodox astrological knowledge in order to counter what he considered to be heterodox astrologers and their public influence.⁵⁶ The book contains much content from previously written books, which had been circulated secretly and are now lost. Wan Mingying also edited the book *Sanming tonghui* 三命通會 (Three life meetings), which expounded Xu Ziping's

52 Ibid., 155–70.

53 For Liu Ji and his reasons for joining Zhu, see Langlois, “Song Lian and Liu Ji in 1358,” 131–62.

54 Lü and Li, *Mingchao keji*, 9–12.

55 For *fuzhou*'s use in political activities, see chapter four in Liu, *Zhongguo fuzhou wenhua*.

56 Ho, *Chinese Mathematical Astrology*, 70–71.

divination method, mentioned above. Similar to the *Xingxue dacheng*, this book also became a comprehensive collection of Chinese horoscopy. Therefore, both books can be seen as encyclopedic collections of astrology, preserving a vast amount of information from before the Ming Dynasty. They constitute, therefore, important sources for exploring the knowledge and practices of astrologers.⁵⁷ Although the number of divination books published during the Ming period remains small compared to the Song period, the former works were more comprehensive and systematic, and also had a profound, long-term impact on the ensuing Qing period.

8 The Qing Period: Divination before the Impact of Western Learning

At the end of the Ming period, the accuracy of the Chinese traditional astral sciences was decreasing, which sparked a crisis in the interpretation of astrology. This happened at exactly the same time as Western knowledge was introduced to China by European missionaries and also led to a conflict between the Western and Chinese astral sciences. Eventually, following the advice of ministers such as Xu Guangqi 徐光啟 (1562–1633) and Li Tianjing 李天經 (1579–1659), the Chongzhen 崇禎 Emperor (r. 1628–1644) decided to establish a specific institution in which Chinese scholars and western missionaries cooperatively translated and edited western astronomical knowledge. These efforts resulted in the publication of the book *Chongzhen lishu* 崇禎曆書 (Book on calendrical astronomy of the Chongzhen reign). The impact of this book was limited, however, due to the obstruction of several traditional Chinese officials, which led to a protracted competition between Western, Chinese, and Islamic astronomy during the late Ming and early Qing periods. The controversy continued until the Kangxi 康熙 emperor (r. 1661–1722) assumed state power in 1669.⁵⁸

As a result of this competition, the Western astral sciences finally gained the trust of the emperors and certain officials at the Qing court.⁵⁹ This victory changed some aspects of the routine work of the Bureau of Astronomy, but did not affect the role traditionally ascribed to the study of astronomy. That is to say, astronomy remained a pragmatic tool for fulfilling the astrological, ritual, and political roles of the Bureau of Astronomy within the bureaucratic hierarchy centered on the emperor, rather than becoming a branch of knowledge

57 Ibid., 154–55.

58 Han, *Tongtian zhixue*, 19–37.

59 Lü, “Eclipses and the Victory of European Astronomy,” 127.

that aimed to explore the principles of the celestial motions based on careful observations, as in Europe. Accordingly, although the Western methods showed that astronomical phenomena actually resulted from regular movements by the celestial bodies, which, it was thought at that time, could be described and predicted very exactly according to mathematical rules, they were still deemed politically significant portents by the officials working within the Bureau of Astronomy. Although Western astronomical methods came to be used for calculations in the Qiantian jian, astronomy still revolved around a national astronomer or astrologist, who made astrological interpretations for the emperor based on celestial observations, which was, in fact, exactly the same role as it had played during the Ming period. The political significance of astronomy thus prevented a more fundamental reform of the Chinese astral sciences.

The management of the Qiantian jian during the Qing period also largely followed the system of the Ming Dynasty. During the early Qing period, the Bureau was an agency under the Ministry of Rites (Libu 禮部), which, in addition to state ceremonies and court rituals, was also in charge of managing the civil examination system and also visits by foreign dignitaries. In the 1640s, the Qiantian jian was divided into four sections: Section of the Calendar (Like 曆科 or Shixian ke 時憲科), Section of Heavenly Signs (Tianwen ke 天文科), Section of Water Clocks (Louke ke 漏刻科), and the Islamic Section (Huihui ke).⁶⁰

Due to the specific structure of the court system, every department of the Qing government had two leaders, one Han 漢 (Chinese) and one Manchu. In 1664, the Qiantian jian began to select Manchu officials who were proficient in both Chinese and Manchu and established the position of Manchu director, who took overall charge of the institution. In addition, the Kangxi emperor appointed several Western missionaries as officials to the Qiantian jian in 1669. From that point onward, Manchu, Han and western missionaries worked cooperatively together in the Qiantian jian until the Daoguang 道光 emperor (r. 1820–1850) came to power and the missionaries ceased working in China.⁶¹

As for the function and responsibility of the four sections of the Qiantian jian, the Section of the Calendar focused on making astronomical calculations. The calculations and predictions of astronomical phenomena mainly relied on the comparatively more accurate methods introduced by the Western missionaries. The Section of Heavenly Signs was responsible for observing celestial phenomena, such as eclipses, meteors, etc., as well as their astrological interpretation based on divination manuals. Every day, the Section of Heavenly

60 Shi, "Qing Qiantian jian guanli tanze," 54.

61 Chen and Zhang, *Zhongguo gudai tianwen jigou*, 182–96.

Signs also observed and recorded weather information, such as rain, wind, thunder, and clouds, and reported truthfully whether any irregular meteorological phenomena had occurred. The Section of Water Clocks engaged in divination to choose an auspicious time for important ceremonies, ritual activities, and the optimum time of construction work to begin. In general, activities related to divination in the Section of Heavenly Signs and Section of Water Clocks were mainly undertaken by the Han staff. The western missionaries did not participate in this, as divination and astrological interpretation conflicted with their religious beliefs.⁶²

Regarding the management of astrological activities, especially the prohibition of private astrological activities, the policies of the Qing Dynasty (1636–1912) were more relaxed than those of the Ming Dynasty. Prior to the Qing period, astrological knowledge, as the prerogative of officials, was strictly prohibited from being privately studied. The laws of the Ming Dynasty laid down very clear, strict rules regarding the punishment of private individuals who studied astrology and astronomy. Before the end of the Ming Dynasty, however, astronomical officials in the Qintian jian had failed to predict the time of eclipses numerous times, so many officials issued an appeal to loosen the prohibition on astrological study and recruit astrological talent from outside the Qintian jian;⁶³ for example, in 1629, Xu Guangqi submitted a proposal to reduce control over the private study of astronomy, specifically explaining that some officials misunderstood and confused the concepts of celestial patterns (*tianwen* 天文) and calendrical astronomy (*lifa* 曆法). The former referred to astronomical observations and astrological interpretations based on observation, while the latter astronomy represented astronomical calculation and the calendar. He pointed out that the public needed a calendar to know the seasons, wherefore it was unnecessary or impossible to prohibit people from making astronomical observations and studying calendar calculation. Instead, he argued, the government should only prohibit astrological interpretation and the circulation of astrological books among the public, lest individuals should interpret political and state affairs in the light of astrology, thus spreading rumors about inauspicious phenomena which might bewilder the public.⁶⁴ Other scholars from the Qing period, such as Mei Wending 梅文鼎 (1633–1721), submitted similar suggestions to the Qing court.

62 Shi, "Qing Qintian jian zhiguan zhidu," 331. For the Christian attitude toward divination, see Michael Lackner's introduction to this handbook.

63 Chang, "Zhanxingshu yu Zhong-Xi jiaoliu."

64 Huang, *Shehui tianwenxueshi*, 93–120.

These proposals formed part of a general attempt among scholars from the late Ming and early Qing periods to clarify the difference between astronomical calculation and astrological interpretation, which promoted changes in the management style of the Qintian jian. As a result, in 1725, the rules prohibiting the private study of astronomy were officially deleted from the law issued by the court of the Yongzheng 雍正 Emperor (r. 1722–1735). From that point onward, the Qintian jian was no longer the only place where individuals might study astronomy legally and many excellent astronomers outside this office assumed more prominent roles. This promoted an exchange between professionals in the Qintian jian and non-professionals. Nevertheless, despite the reduction of these stipulations, the Qintian jian remained under the strict supervision of the court due to its special position and function. Astrological activities in particular had to be carried out formally and strictly according to the law of the Qing government, which contained specific requirements for the working routine of the Qintian jian. The Kangxi emperor in particular was proficient in astronomy and astrology, and often observed astronomical phenomena, thereby also identifying mistakes that had been committed by the Qintian jian.⁶⁵ This is why he not only placed strict requirements on the work of the Bureau, but also emphasized that the reports had to be truthful to celestial observation and astrological interpretation. Kangxi's attitude also influenced his successors and offspring, from the Yongzheng emperor through to the Daoguang emperor.

The historical archives feature many illuminating records about astrological or prognostic events, managed by the Qintian jian, which indicate how this institution, which was so closely intertwined with divination, operated; for example, when, in 1798, the Qintian jian failed to submit a report about a meteor shower, the Jiaqing 嘉慶 Emperor (r. 1796–1820) criticized the officials within the Bureau, and chided them for hiding their astrological interpretations. In 1818, he once again rebuked the Qintian jian, and pointed out that the Bureau only submitted auspicious reports while astrological interpretations had to be truthful and trustworthy. In 1835, Jing Zheng 敬征 (1784–1851), the director of the Qintian jian, was punished and removed from his position because he had failed to follow the hemerological compendium *Qinding xieji bianfang shu* 欽定協紀辨方書 (Imperially endorsed treatise on harmonizing times and distinguishing directions), as had been stipulated by the emperor, which resulted in him selecting the wrong date for the queen's funeral.⁶⁶

65 Chang, "Zhanxingshu yu Zhong-Xi jiaoliu."

66 Smith, "The Legacy of Daybooks."

Qing law contained severe punishments for officials who committed mistakes while working in the Qintian jian; for example, an astrologer who made a mistake would be spanked sixty times. If the staff of the Qintian jian concealed ominous celestial phenomena intentionally, as punishment, the related astrological officials would be beaten with a large stick on either the back or buttocks eighty times, then exiled to a remote place for two years. In the *Daqing lüli* 大清律例 (Laws and precedents of the Great Qing), there were other comparable punishments for various mistakes committed by the Qintian jian.⁶⁷

The Qintian jian also had clear rules regarding which astrological books they should use. They continued to employ the traditional Chinese book *Guanxiang wanzhan* 觀象玩占 (Playful divination [based] on the observation of images) that had already been in use in the Qintian jian by the Ming period. To predict celestial phenomena, however, they mainly relied on the methods introduced by the Western missionaries.⁶⁸ In order to unify the interpretation of various methods of divination, the Qing court published several works which were endorsed by the emperors. In 1683, the book *Qinding xuanze lishu* 欽定選擇曆書 (Imperially-endorsed treatise on the deliberation of hemerology) was completed and published in the following year. In 1715, another book, entitled *Yuding xingli kaoyuan* 禦定星曆考原 (Imperially-endorsed treatise on the investigation of origins of planets ephemerides), was completed by Li Guangdi 李光地 (1642–1718) under the order of Emperor Kangxi.⁶⁹ There remained, however, a number of contradictory interpretations in these books. During the Qianlong 乾隆 reign (1735–1796), the emperor ordered a comprehensive revision of various divination theories, which culminated eventually in the publication of the *Qinding xieji bianfang shu*, mentioned above. This book became one of the most comprehensive and rigorous works in pre-modern China, and contributed to the flourishing of several types of divination techniques during the Qing period.

9 Concluding Remarks

Since the emergence of Chinese divination, it has exerted a broad, profound influence on Chinese society, politics, and culture. Many historical political events have been affected by divination and the contingent nature of divinatory

67 Shi, "Qing Qintian jian zhiguan zhidu," 331.

68 Ibid.

69 He, *Huangli de qianshi jinsheng*, 29–38.

interpretation;⁷⁰ for example, Chen Sheng 陳勝 (?–c.208 BCE) and Wu Guang 吳廣 (?–c.208 BCE) decided to start an uprising based on divination. If the result had been inauspicious, what decision would they have taken? What if Emperor Yingzong 英宗 (r. 1435–1449 and 1457–1464) of the Ming had received a different astrological interpretation from the Qintian jian before embarking on his northern expedition? Had the Bureau judged the astronomical phenomena to be normal, would the Crisis at the Tumu Fortress (*Tumu bao zhi bian* 土木堡之變) still have occurred, or the defeat by the Mongols, which led to the capture of Emperor Yingzong in 1449? Many similar historical political incidents that were affected by astrological interpretations occurred throughout Chinese history,⁷¹ which indicates that some may have been caused by astrological interpretation rather than the political wisdom of the court.

Even if, today, we do not share a belief in the logic and theories behind divination, there is no doubt that these skills have been prevalent throughout Chinese history and even remain so in contemporary China, and have affected people's behavior and psychology. Even in 1910, just one year before the 1911 Revolution, the apparition of Harley's comet sparked public discussion, and there was widespread debate about its astrological interpretation in the light of the fate of the Xuantong 宣統 Emperor (r. 1908–1911). Novels, poems, drawings, and various writings about the comet were published in newspapers, magazines, and books. Even a kind of *Volkslied* circulated in the public, such as “comet appearing to the east and west, only two and half years for Emperor Xuantong's reign” (*Huixing dongxi xian, Xuantong ernian ban* 彗星東西現, 宣統二年半). There were many different versions similar to this *Volkslied*. Far more interesting is the fact that even some intellectuals who were influenced by western scientific knowledge, and supported the revolution, propagated similar stories to convince the public that the apparition of Harley's comet was an omen foretelling the bankruptcy of the Qing Dynasty and presaging the Emperor's downfall.⁷² It is arguable that this case shows that, when intellectuals and politicians faced moments of crisis, when unexpected celestial phenomena and a national crisis coincided, their belief in divination outweighed their new-found western or scientific knowledge.

70 Wei, *Shenmi yu miwang*, 13.

71 Huang, *Shehui tianwen xue*, 1–92.

72 Chen and Lü, “Geming yu xingming,” 78.

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Critique and Recognition

Mantic Arts and Their Practitioners in the Writings of Song Literati

Liao Hsien-huei

1 Introduction

In Chinese history, practitioners of mantic arts who used divination and other techniques to foretell the future not only existed for a long time, but also maintained constant and close interactions with the upper class. However, their political and social status was precarious and often altered with the changing historical circumstances. During the Shang 商 (ca. 1600–1046 BCE) and Zhou 周 (ca. 1046–256 BCE) dynasties, when people inquired about the “heavenly will” (*tianyi* 天意) regarding all affairs, this kind of knowledge and techniques was monopolized by a small number of people, and those who sustained them often occupied important political positions.¹ After the periods of Spring and Autumn 春秋 (770 – ca. 476 BCE), the Warring States 戰國 (475–220 BCE) and the Qin 秦 (221–206 BCE) and Han 漢 (206 BCE–220 CE) dynasties, as the mainstream thought gradually shifted to focus on human nature and morality, these types of techniques as well as the position of those who sustained them began to be marginalized.² Although there remained individual cases of skilled diviners who were favored by the emperors, their importance within the political system gradually diminished. During the Sui 隋 (581–618 CE) and Tang 唐 (618–907 CE) dynasties, the transmitted techniques were incorporated into the philosophy sub-section (*zibu* 子部) of the official knowledge classification system and the mantic arts no longer constituted an independent, identifiable category, further indicating their reduced importance in the scholarly field.³ However, the continued decline in the status of these diviners

1 Chang, *Zhongguo qingtong shidai*, 261–90.

2 For a further discussion about the related changes in thought, particularly during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States period, see Ge, *Zhongguo sixiang shi*, esp. part 2, 67–207.

3 A comparison of the classifications in the “Yiwenzhi 藝文志” (Treatise on arts and letters) in the *Hanshu* 漢書 (Book of Han) and of the “Jingjiezhi 經籍志” (Treatise on literature) in the *Suishu* 隋書 (Book of Sui) indicates that the originally separate genres of the military school (*bingjia* 兵家), the mantic arts (*shushu* 術數) and the techniques (*fangji* 方技) were all merged into the divisions of the four categories (*sibu* 四部, classics, history, philosophers,

seems to have undergone a subtle change during the Song 宋 dynasty, a time of great social mobility. Many intellectuals who were interested in an official career frequently contacted the diviners, which not only caused the latter to feature frequently in their life and writings, but also subtly reshaped the diviners' social image and status.⁴ This article will begin by exploring the interactions between the literati and diviners during the Song dynasty to assess how the latter's social status changed due to their close communication with the literati, from which aspects these changes can be observed, and the influence that these changes exerted on the diviners together with their knowledge and techniques. Moreover, the article will explore how these changes reflect the literati's own views and the subtle shift in their knowledge classification, social networks and even understanding of life.⁵

2 “Bian shuo” 汴說: Wang Anshi's 王安石 Interest in the Mantic Arts

One may gain a sense of the literati's understanding of the mantic arts and their practitioners from their writings. Examples of writings on specific mantic arts or certain practitioners are often seen in history,⁶ but descriptions of the overall image of their communities are relatively rare. In the Song dynasty, Wang Anshi's 王安石 (1021–1086) essay, “Bian shuo” 汴說 (On Bian), is a typical case of such a rare description. It was written in the third year of the Qingli

and miscellaneous collections) after the Sui 隋 and Tang 唐 dynasties, and were no longer independent categories. During the late Qing dynasty and early Republican period, the Western knowledge system became widely accepted, which transformed the previous classification scheme into seven categories: arts, science, law, commerce, medicine, industry and agriculture (*wen li fa shang yi gong nong* 文理法商醫工農). The mantic arts were thoroughly marginalized, and the rationality of their existence was also negated. Ge Zhaoguang, *Zhongguo sixiang shi*, 596–99; Li and Lackner, “Contradictory Forms of Knowledge?”.

4 Liao, “Exploring Weal and Woe”; Liao, “Ti yan ‘xiao dao’”; Liao, “Xiantan, jishi yu duihua.”

5 For the impact of mantic arts on the worldview of the literati, please see the analysis of Lang Mixie (Michael Lackner), “Shiren yudao shushi.”

6 Official histories (*zhengshi* 正史), encyclopedias (*leishu* 類書), or local gazetteers (*fangzhi* 方志) often included the biographies of diviners or descriptions of mantic arts. Examples include the “Rizhe liezhuan 日者列傳” (Biographies of soothsayers) in the *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the historian), the “Yiwenzhi” in the *Hanshu*, the “Yishu dian 藝術典” [Section of the arts] in the *Qinding gujin tushu jicheng*, *Bowu huibian* 欽定古今圖書集成, 博物彙編 (Synthesis of books and illustrations past and present, encyclopedic collections), and the *Zhongguo lidai buren zhuan* 中國歷代卜人傳 (Biographies of diviners in Chinese history) that was collected and compiled by Yuan Shushan 袁樹珊 (1881–1968) in the late Qing dynasty and early Republican China, according to records of the historical chronicles of the past dynasties. For a relevant discussion, see the chapter by Richard Smith in this volume.

慶曆 reign of Emperor Renzong 仁宗 (1043), which was the year after Wang Anshi passed the highest imperial exams to earn the degree of *jinsshi* 進士 and was assigned as an Administrative Assistant in Huainan (Huainan panguan 淮南判官). The essay was a gift to a visitor from Jinhua 金華 (Zhejiang province), who claimed to be able to foretell misfortune and fortune.⁷ However, unlike most of the essays that were written as a gift, this essay does not focus on describing its recipient but, rather, emphasizes the author's personal observations and opinions regarding the phenomenon of fortune-telling.⁸ Overall, the essay outlines the image of the diviners at that time in terms of their overall number, their treatment, and their influence. The author starts with the historical origins to conduct a qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the multifarious, disorderly mantic arts and their omnipresent practitioners in society at that time:

In ancient times, divination was performed by assigned officers to inquire into regular affairs. However, such practices as observing the sequence of the astrological constellations at a person's birth, or measuring and inspecting people's demeanor, appearance, complexion and skin texture to predict their misfortune and fortune cannot be found when studying the sages, nor is it known from whom these were passed down. Those who followed their theories spread unchecked in all places and have become especially numerous nowadays. Tens of thousands of people call themselves diviners nationwide, excluding the capital city of Bian 汴. In Bian city alone, the number of people engaging in mantic arts may also reach ten thousand.⁹

古者卜筮有常官，所諏有常事。若考步人生辰星宿所次，訾相人儀狀色理，逆斥人禍福，考信於聖人無有也，不知從何許人傳。宗其說者，澶漫四出，抵今為尤著，舉天下而籍之，以是自名者，蓋數萬不啻，而汴不與焉。舉汴而籍之，蓋亦以萬計。

It is obvious from the above quote that Wang Anshi held a skeptical, critical attitude toward the rationality of the various types of fortune-telling mantic arts that were not seen in ancient times but derived in later generations. What

7 Li Deshen, *Wang Anshi shiwen xinian*, 35; Liu Chengguo, *Wang Anshi nianpu changbian*, vol. 1, *juan* 卷 2, 118–19.

8 The expression of Confucian and their personal viewpoints by the literati in essays presented to diviners can also be seen in the example of Zhen Dexiu 真德秀. Liao, "Zhengxue yu xiaodao."

9 Wang Anshi, *Linchuan wenji*, *juan* 70, 5b.

is even more striking is his emphasis on the omnipresence of various types of practitioners, as well as the estimate of the overall number of people involved. The quantitative estimate that he provides is certainly far from accurate and merely conveys his general impression. However, the mere act of trying to give an estimate of the number of diviners demonstrates that their omnipresence had apparently reached an unignorable degree.

Next, Wang Anshi described the life situation and social networks of mantic practitioners according to his observation of Bian city, especially in relation to how they made their living, what kind of customers they served, how they were treated, and how many customers usually visited and consulted them:

I once examined the mantic practitioners in Bian. They are good at using marvelous [skills] to thrill people. The eminent [practitioners] surpass [even] the royal and noble families in terms of the splendor of their residence, their clothes and palanquins, and their food. If they go out, [it is because] someone has summoned [them] and, if one asks them who [called] on them, [they reply that it was] a courtier. When they return with presents and one asks them who [gave it to them], they [answer that it was] a courtier. If one were to sit for a whole day and night at the side of their house to count the [number] of people coming and going, who sit shoulder to shoulder, their heels trampling on each other, then their number would be countless.¹⁰

予嘗視卜汴之術士，善挾奇而以動人者，大祀〔抵〕宮廬、服輿、食飲之華，封君不如也。其出也，或召焉，問之，某人也，朝貴人也；其歸也，或賜焉，問之，某人也，朝貴人也。坐其廬旁，歷其人之往來，肩相切，踵相籍，窮一朝暮，則已錯不可計。

In his view, the diviners in Bian city, who could impress people with their marvelous skills, were always very welcome and enjoyed honor, splendor, wealth, and high rank. They often performed fortune-telling services for imperial dignitaries and were rewarded accordingly. In addition, they welcomed numerous clients into their homes, who lined up outside, rubbing shoulders due to their large number. The treatment of the diviners and their popularity among the dignitaries described in this paragraph indicate the vast size of this community, as mentioned in the previous paragraph.

Immediately after describing the image mentioned above, Wang Anshi expressed his doubts and regret at this phenomenon. This expression of his

¹⁰ Ibid., 5b–6a.

inner feelings also allows us to understand why he cared about the diviners' population and carefully described the reasons for their lifestyle:

I deem this strange and regrettable: we study the words of the former sages and cultivate their arts. We can assist the son of heaven to create peace when we extend [our knowledge and abilities]. Even if we confine [our talents to the private sphere], they would still suffice to cultivate ourselves and bring order to the family. However, never have there been high-ranking, accomplished officials who have sought my service in this manner. Someone asked me: "How come you wonder at this? Those who are thirsty will long for liquid and the sick long for medicine. [This's because] they can cure [their longing]. You, sir, are certainly able to assist the son of heaven in his striving for peace and to cultivate yourself and bring order to your family. Other [officials, however,] cherish authority and status. If your authority is lacking and your status insufficient, then you will be obsessed by it and, if you're obsessed by it, you'll become doubtful. [Moreover], even if your authority is already far-reaching and your status sufficient, then you'll still worry about losing them and, if you're worried about losing them, this'll make you anxious and, if you're anxious and doubtful, then you'll long for it to stop. Those [practices] are able to put a stop to it. Can [the teachings of the former sages] achieve this as well? If not, then do not be surprised that they frequent those [practitioners] but neglect [the teachings]." Due to [this explanation], I understood and no longer found it strange.¹¹

竊異之，且竊嘆曰：吾儕治先聖人之言，而修其術，張之能為天子營太平，斂之猶足以提身正家，顧未嘗有公卿徹官若是其即之勤也。或曰：「子知乎？渴者期於漿，疾者期於醫，治然也。子誠能為天子營太平，提身正家，彼所存勢與位爾。勢不盈，位不充，則熱中，熱中則惑。勢盈位充矣，則病失之，病失之則憂。惑且憂，則思決。以彼為能決，子亦能乎？不能，則無異其即彼疎此也。」因寤不復異。

Wang's greatest perplexity was that Confucian literati like himself, who were familiar with the scriptures of the Confucian sages and had the ability to assist the emperor to establish peaceful society, or at least help individuals to cultivate themselves and manage their families, were never asked for advice by those dignitaries and noblemen who were so cordially consulting the diviners.

11 Wang Anshi, *Linchuan wenji*, juan 70, 6a–b.

However, it seemed relatively easy for others to address his perplexity. The key was the relationship between supply and demand. The reason why diviners were so popular was that their techniques corresponded to the needs of most people at that time. As most people were concerned with pursuing power and status rather than managing the nation and self-cultivation, diviners who could foretell misfortune and fortune were frequently visited and enthusiastically consulted. Moreover, people continued to seek help from diviners even after attaining office out of a fear of losing their status. Obviously, anxiety about changes in status could be relieved to a considerable degree by diviners, who were thus widely welcomed by the dignitaries and noblemen.

Whether or not Wang Anshi really came to understand why the diviners were omnipresent and more popular than the Confucian literati, the essay also obviously conveys an important message; namely, that the competition that Confucianism encountered at that time seem to have been more than simply the classical doctrines of Buddhism and Daoism. Even mantic arts, previously denigrated as the “small ways” (*xiaodao* 小道),¹² began to threaten the intellectual status of “the orthodox way” (*zhengdao* 正道) of Confucianism. From the statements in the essay, it is clearly felt that the diviners’ skill of foretelling misfortune and fortune was deeply welcomed by those who aspired to an official career. This was due to their ability to foretell the future, which helped the latter to relieve the anxiety caused by the pursuit of power and status. Since such a demand did not end upon the acquisition of power and status, the contact between the literati and diviners was not simply casual and sporadic, but probably became long-term, uninterrupted relationships based on recourse, reliance, and even mutual benefit. Contact with diviners became a frequent occurrence in the life of officials. Moreover, when many literati became interested in mantic arts and frequently interacted with diviners, the proper aspirations and ambitions of a Confucian literatus might be relatively ignored or sidelined. This is also a key aspect about which Wang Anshi, who had recently passed the imperial exams and become an official and self-proclaimed Confucian scholar, was doubtful or even worried.

Although this essay by Wang Anshi was based on personal observation, experience, and feelings, it also provides a glimpse into the common life experience of many of the literati at that time. First of all, because Wang described the diviners in Bian city as a whole group rather than as individuals, the phenomena he described, including the omnipresence of fortune-telling diviners and their close interactions with the literati, were not limited to his personal

12 For the meaning and historical origin of the concept of the “small ways” (*xiaodao* 小道), see Liao, “Zhishi de fenlei yu jieding.”

vision, which attests to their considerable visibility and universality at that time. Secondly, he pointed out that dignitaries and others who aspired to an official career were eager to consult diviners to elicit information about their future social status and fortune, but rarely sought out Confucian literati for help in managing the country and self-cultivation. This shows that the group of literati who closely interacted with the diviners was not simply a minority or individual cases, but would have accounted for a considerable proportion of the whole. Moreover, since the literati usually had more resources than ordinary people, the rewards they could offer diviners may have been more abundant and diverse, which was also an important incentive for diviners to interact with them frequently. However, the author's concern about the threat that mantic arts and their practitioners posed to Confucianism and the Confucian literati, indicated in this essay, was based on his personal feeling. Therefore, it requires more careful reflection to see how widely this feeling resonated at that time. In particular, as the author complained that people consulted diviners rather than Confucian literati, those who shared his way of thinking may have been in the minority. In any case, whether the above perspectives reflect the social reality at the time, and whether and in how far the relationship between the literati and diviners corresponds to or transcends the statements contained in his essay, all warrant further exploration. The following will discuss the records and descriptions of other literati regarding the distribution of diviners at that time, together with their aims, ways of interacting, and social ideological image and position within the literati's writings.

3 The Life of the Diviners and Their Literati Clients

Wang Anshi used the phrases "ten thousand" and "tens of thousands" to highlight the great number and high visibility of the diviners. Did he use these numbers because he was personally oversensitive to the distribution and activities of the diviners, or because the diviners could really be seen everywhere to such an extent that they could not be ignored? Unfortunately, he did not provide any further information in the essay to explain his estimate. However, in his writings, diviners appear to be a universal phenomenon, who were active everywhere and had close contact and interaction with the literati community. Hence, by carefully examining the writings of other literati at that time, it should be possible to achieve some degree of verification and understanding of his description. At the same time, we can obtain a more detailed picture of the diviners' community and analyze their position within the literati's life at that time. Since Wang Anshi distinguished between Bian city and the whole

nation in his statement, the following analysis will differentiate between the perspective from the capital city of Bian/Lin'an 臨安 and an overview of the whole nation when discussing how the literati during the Song dynasty perceived and wrote about diviners.

A closer examination of the records of the literati reveals that Wang Anshi's description of the omnipresence of diviners was clearly not merely his personal opinion. The capital city Bian of the Northern Song dynasty and the capital city Lin'an of the Southern Song dynasty were indeed flooded by all kinds of mantic arts practitioners, who claimed to be able to foretell misfortune and fortune. In each city, there were several well-known places where mantic arts practitioners gathered, in addition to individual diviners and wandering fortune-tellers who could be seen everywhere, which together constituted an integral part of the urban landscape. Most of these areas where diviners gathered were located within important markets in the capital, which stood alongside department stores. In the case of Bian capital, Daxiangguo Temple (Da xiangguo si 大相國寺), located next to the Bian River (Bian he 汴河) is one example.¹³ Although this Buddhist temple was highly respected nationwide, with many important national celebrations being held there,¹⁴ it was also the biggest commercial area in the capital city of Bian at that time: "Daxiangguo Temple of the Eastern Capital was a marketplace, with rooms for monks scattered about, and two wings in the central courtyard, which could accommodate ten thousand people. All sorts of transactions among travelling merchants were concentrated within them" (東京相國寺乃瓦市也，僧房散處，而中庭兩廡可容萬人，凡商旅交易，皆萃其中).¹⁵ This was an extremely active trading place, where people interacted and where there were numerous goods from the south and north alongside various specific local products. In every area (the three big gates, central square, Buddha hall, two corridors, back of the hall, back porch, etc.), specific products were sold, and there was also a place where divination practitioners gathered: "All diviners, fortune-tellers

13 In addition, in the street market in the southeastern corner of the Imperial City, there were also diviners who set up booths and shops. See "Dongjiaolou jiexiang 東角樓街巷" [Streets and alleys of Dongjiaolou], in Meng Yuanlao, *Dongjing meng hua lu*, juan 2, 5a–6a.

14 Xiangguo Temple was known as the royal temple during the Song dynasty. Its abbot was often appointed by the state. Besides, the emperor often visited the temple on his imperial tour to pray and express his gratitude. In addition, the relevant ceremonies on the birthdays of the royal family and the nomination of the *jinshi* 進士 were also held here.

15 "Dongjing Xiangguosi 東京相國寺" [The Xiangguo temple in the eastern capital], in Wang Yong, *Yanyi yimou lu*, juan 2, 20.

and their related goods were on the back porch” (後廊皆日者貨術傳神之類).¹⁶ The area where the diviners gathered was immediately next to book stores, painting stores, and the area where dismissed officials peddled local products and spices behind the hall. Certainly, it was not unfamiliar to the literati who strolled around there. Similarly, the market in Lin'an capital of the Southern Song dynasty, because it was a must-see among the literati, was also often the best gathering place for diviners from various places to sell their techniques: “The central market (*zhongwa* 中瓦) of Lin'an was on Imperial Street, and it was a must-see for literati, so mantic arts practitioners from everywhere all gathered there” (臨安中瓦在御街中，士大夫必游之地，天下術士皆聚焉).¹⁷

The areas where the diviners gathered in these capital cities were not only popular among the literati and became the places they often visited and consulted for fortune-telling,¹⁸ but usually even the members of the imperial family knew them well and were deeply attracted to them. The most famous example is certainly that of Northern Song dynasty Emperor Huizong 徽宗 (r. 1100–1126). While still in residence as King Duan 端王, and not yet emperor, he was eager to confirm whether he would gain the throne. He twice sent people to Daxiangguo Temple to visit the diviners who had booths there:

One day, [King Duan] summoned the officer on duty (*zhishengguan* 直省官¹⁹) and instructed him: “Go to Daxiangguo Temple and ask them to delay the opening of the temple, then take the eight characters (*bazi* 八字) assigned to me [by heaven] to inquire everywhere about my fortune or misfortune. However, tell [the diviners] that you're [inquiring] about your own fate, not mine.” The officer did as instructed, visited the place

16 “Xiangguosi wanxing jiaoyi 相國寺萬姓交易” [Transactions of various people at Xiangguo temple], in Meng Yuanlao, *Dongjing menghua lu*, *juan* 3, 3a–4a.

17 Zhang Duanyi, *Gui'er ji*, *juan* 2, 30b–31a. For an example of diviners setting up a booth in the central market of Lin'an, see, “Xia Juyuan 夏巨源,” in Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi, zhiding* 支丁, *juan* 5, 1003–4. For an example of a diviner setting up a booth in the market at the “General's Bridge” (Junjiang qiao 軍將橋), see “Sun sheng sha gua 孫生沙卦” [Master Sun divines by means of the sand table], in Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi, bu* 補, *juan* 18, 1721–22.

18 For example, during the Zhenghe 政和 reign (1111–1118), three *gongshi* 貢士 (students who had passed the provincial exams) from Jianzhou 建州 (in Fujian 福建) visited the capital city together. They all visited Xiangguo Temple and consulted the diviners there about fortune or misfortune and their future rank. They asserted that the diviners could “predict a life's fortune and misfortune with only a few words of divine accuracy” (*ping-sheng fuhuo, duan yi shuyu, qi yan ru shen* 平生禍福，斷以數語，其驗如神). “San shi wen xiang 三士問相” [Three literati consult a physiognomer], in Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi, dingzhi* 丁志, *juan* 5, 573–74.

19 Officers placed under the rear section of the Secretariat-Chancellery (*zhongshu menxia hou sheng* 中書門下後省) to handle daily affairs.

and consulted all of the booths of the diviners to enquire about his misfortune or fortune. [However, what they said] was mainly platitudes and did not conform [to the king's expectations].²⁰

一日，呼直省官謂之曰：「汝於大相國寺遲其開寺，時持我命八字往，即詣卦肆，徧問以吉凶來。第言汝命，勿謂我也。」直省官如言，至歷就諸肆問禍福，大抵常談，盡不合。

The phrases “inquire everywhere” and “all booths” in this passage clearly indicate that Daxiangguo Temple indeed harbored a lot of diviners and fortune-telling practitioners. Obviously, the reason why King Duan sent people to visit and enquire about his fate was that he was attracted by the temple's reputation for being a place where many diviners gathered. In order to avoid nosiness and gossip, the official who accepted the mission asked that the opening of Daxiangguo Temple be delayed, so that he could visit the various divination booths unobserved. However, most of the diviners did not really discuss the envisioned topic. It was not until he visited a man named Chen Yan 陳彥, who wore rags and sat at the end of the row of booths, that he received a startling answer:

[Chen] Yan said: “This can't be your fate. It has to be the fate of the son of heaven.” [At this], the officer became very frightened. He quickly returned and did not dare to divulge [what had transpired]. The next day, he reported back to King Duan, who remained silent. The king then asked him to visit again cautiously: “You should delay the opening time of the temple, and go again to see [the diviner]. However, tell him that this's my fate: no need to hide this again.”²¹

彥曰：「必非汝命，此天子命也。」直省官大駭，狼狽走歸，不敢泄。翌日，還白端王，王默然。因又戒訪：「汝遲開寺，宜再一往見，第言我命，不必更隱。」

Because this Chen Yan saw at first glance that the eight character horoscope did not refer to the official, but foretold the fate of an emperor, the latter immediately ordered the opening of Daxiangguo Temple to be delayed, regardless of the consequences, so that the official could ask this skilled diviner about his

20 Cai Tao, *Tieweishan congtao*, *juan* 3, 41. A similar record also appeared in Zhou Hui, *Qingbo zazhi*, *juan* 6, 241–42.

21 Zhou Hui, *Qingbo zazhi*, *juan* 6, 241–42.

exact future. Whether this anecdote, which was transmitted in Song dynasty brush notes, is true or not, it is certain that the description of the scene seems consistent with the historical circumstances at that time. That is to say, in Daxiangguo Temple in Bian capital, there was indeed a well-known area where diviners gathered and many people at that time, attracted by their reputation, visited it for divination and to enquire about their fate.

In addition to this kind of diviner, who set up a booth in a market, there were also many diviners who operated from home or provided on-site or on-call fortune-telling services. The diviner of Bian capital, previously described by Wang Anshi, appears to have been of this type. At that time, many diviners came from outside the capital, and were famously popular among the literati and dignitaries in the capital. The countryside monk, Daochang, 道昌 (dates unknown) from Wuxi 無錫 is one example: "Shortly after his arrival in the capital, he went in and out of the elite's houses and his predictions were mostly amazingly accurate" (旋至都下，出入貴人之門，語多奇中).²² Xie Shi 謝石 (dates unknown) from Sichuan 四川:

arrived in the capital and used glyphomancy (*xiangzi* 相字)²³ to tell people's fortune and misfortune ... Never did he fail to be wondrously accurate. He was even known to the ninth heaven (*jiu chong* 九重, i.e., the imperial court),²⁴ Therefore, his booth was crowded like a market with people from everywhere who sought him out for glyphomancy.²⁵

至京師，以相字言人禍福...無不奇中者。名聞九重...緣此四方來求相者其門如市。

22 Certain Daoist priests and nuns also mastered mantic techniques and were summoned to the capital. Therefore, "the imperial literati often asked them about fortune and misfortune" (*chaoshi duo wen yi fuhuo* 朝士多問以禍福). Ibid., *juan* 11, 485–86, *juan* 12, 504–5.

23 Translator's note: This is a divination technique based on deciphering Chinese characters.

24 Translator's note: This term refers to the ninth heaven or the highest heaven, but was sometimes also used as a metaphor for the emperor.

25 "Xie Shi chaizi 謝石拆字" [Xie Shi deciphers characters], in He Wei, *Chunzhu jiwen*, *juan* 2, 29–30. During the reigns of Emperor Huizong of the Northern Song dynasty and Gaozong 高宗 (r. 1162–1187) of the Southern Song dynasty, Xie Shi visited the capital cities of Bian and Lin'an, respectively, to advertise his mantic art skills and earn his living. An account of his time in the capitals can also be found in Cai Tao, *Tieweishan congkan*, *juan* 3, 42–44; "Xie Shi chai zi 謝石拆字" [Xie Shi deciphers characters], in Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi*, *bu*, *juan* 19, 1724, 1788–89; and Zhou Bida, "Xie Shi chaizi 謝石拆字" [Xie Shi deciphers characters], in *Wenzhong ji*, *juan* 182, 7b–8a.

The first example indicates that diviners were frequently summoned to the homes of the literati to provide fortune-telling. The second example, on the other hand, shows that, once a diviner became well-known, many people would visit him to benefit from his fortune-telling skills. Moreover, from the example of the famous fortune-telling monk, Huacheng 化成 (dates unknown), of the Northern Song Dynasty, we learn not only that he was “summoned by the elites” (*guiren zhaohuan* 貴人召喚), but also that “those seeking him out for physiognomy were numerous” (*qiu xiang zhe zhong* 求相者眾). Due to the popularity of Huacheng at that time, only those with considerable political status could “call” or “summon” him to their houses for fortune-telling.²⁶ Those who were still on their way to an official career, on the other hand, could only visit his divination booth and line up for a fate consultation. According to the records, during the provincial examinations, Cai Jing 蔡京 (1047–1126) and his brother were attracted by Huacheng’s reputation and so visited his booth to inquire about their fortune. However, they had a long wait. “[H]is place was full of people inquiring about [their] fortune; they had to wait for a whole day before they got a chance to see him” (時問命者盈門，彌日方得前。).²⁷

In fact, in terms of the distribution of diviners, the capital and other regions had much in common. In other regions, many specific places were also well-known among the literati because one or more diviners were providing divination services there. For example, because the local markets were often crowded, various divination booths often stood in the markets alongside other stalls, which also caught the eye of the literati who were strolling around there.²⁸ In addition, some of the Daoist monasteries or Buddhist temples, because

26 Hou Yanqing, *Tuizhai bilu*, 106–7. Other terms, such as *yao* 邀 (invitation) and *yan* 延, shared the same meaning. Su Zhou, *Luancheng xiansheng yiyuan*, 157; Wei Tai, *Dongxuan bilu*, *juan* 5, 54; Zhang Shunmin, *Huaman lu*, 202–3; “Chu Xianjue 楚先覺,” in Wang Mingqing, *Touxia lu*, 44a–45a.

27 Xu Du, *Quesao bian*, *juan* 2, 9a. In addition, some diviners even lived in the homes of the literati when they arrived in the capital. Li Shining 李士寧, for example, once stayed at Wang Anshi’s house. During the reign of Huizong, many practitioners who were summoned to the capital due to their mantic skills stayed in the home of Cai Jing. Sima Guang, *Sushui jiwen*, *juan* 16, 320–21; Wei Tai, *Dongxuan bilu*, *juan* 5, 54; Cai Tao, *Tieweishan cong-tan*, *juan* 5, 88–89.

28 In the sources, literati who inquired about their fate or consulted physiognomers were often described as “visiting the market to look for diviners” (*yi shi fang bu* 詣市訪卜) or “consulting diviners in the market” (*wen bu yu shi* 問卜於市). “Zui ke fu shi 醉客賦詩” [Drunken guests composing poems], in Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi, sanzhi ren* 三志壬, *juan* 5, 1500–1; Liu Zai, “Li Tongzhi xingshu 李通直行述” [Chronicle of the actions and the character of Li Tongzhi], in *Mantang ji*, *juan* 34, 4a–7b.

they often had Daoists or monks who were skilled fortune-tellers, also became places that many literati visited to enquire about their fate. The most famous example was Xu Shouxin 徐守信 (1032–1108), who was a Daoist at Tianqing 天慶 Monastery in Taizhou 泰州 (Jiangsu province). He was well-known for his marvelous prognostication skills, earning him the nickname “divine old man Xu” (Xu shenweng 徐神翁). Attracted by his reputation, those who consulted him about their fortune included the emperor, literati, general scholars and ordinary people. His popularity was reflected not only by the fact that his extraordinarily accurate prognostications were repeatedly retold and praised by various people and recorded in the literati’s brush notes,²⁹ but also by the fact that, by his side, were many people whose profession was to explain his prognostications, and that his prognostications were carefully collected and compiled into a book.³⁰

Frequently, the locations where the literati gathered or often visited were also the locations where diviners could gather most easily. For example, close to school buildings (*xueshe* 學舍) or examination halls (*gongyuan* 貢院) was often the best place for diviners to display their skills, because those who were pursuing the official road to honor and fame frequented these areas.³¹ Undoubtedly, the reason why there were so many diviners in the capitals of the

29 For example, Cai Tao, *Tieweishan congfan*, *juan* 1, 1; Wei Tai, *Dongxuan bilu*, *juan* 13, 148; “Cai Jing dongming chen 蔡京東明讖” [Cai Jing’s Dongming prophecy], in Zhou Hui, *Qingbo zazhi*, *juan* 2, 74–75.

30 Zhu Yi et al., *Xujing chonghe xiansheng Xu Shenweng yulu*, 613–36. For the divination method of Xu Shouxin 徐守信 and his customers, see Richard von Glahn’s “Review of *Changing Gods in Medieval China, 1127–1276*, by Valerie Hansen,” 620–21. In addition, there were examples related to monks and temples, such as the Fujianese monk, Zhang Shengzhe 張聖者 and his follower, Zhang Wuwu 張無無, from Taiping Temple 太平寺 in Jianchang 建昌. The latter could accurately foretell people’s misfortune and fortune, so that “the literati often consulted him” (*shidaifu duo jiuye* 士大夫多就謁). “Lü Zhongji qiancheng 呂仲及前程” [The future of Lü Zhongji], in Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi, sanzhi ren*, *juan* 2, 1482.

31 An official school (*guanxue* 官學) was not necessarily part of most literati’s learning process, but passing the civil service examination in the examination hall was the primary way to become an official. Every three years, when it was the time for the great imperial exams, many diviners were drawn to the Examination Hall and its surrounding area, where many students gathered, to set up booths and sell their divination techniques. During the reign of Emperor Huizong of the Northern Song Dynasty, the “three-college system” (*san she fa* 三舍法) was promoted nationwide. As a result, the schools all across China became a gathering place for literati which, in turn, led diviners to set up their booths close by. “Wu Renjun 吳任鈞,” in Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi, bu*, *juan* 2, 1562–63; “Zhu Anguo xiang zi 朱安國相字” [Zhu Anguo deciphers characters], in Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi, bu*, *juan* 19, 1725–26.

two Song Dynasties is also closely related to the fact that these were where the provincial and imperial exams were held, and hence all of the students in the nation who were taking the exams gathered there.³²

Another reason why people felt that diviners were everywhere is that, in addition to the fixed divination booths, many diviners wandered around various places and even took the initiative to visit people in their homes to sell their fortune-telling techniques and expand their pool of customers. In other words, even if the literati in the capitals or local areas were uncertain about where the diviners gathered, or were not very motivated to inquire about their fortune, they would still frequently encounter various diviners in their daily life. Usually, before the diviners had established a reputation and credibility, or could not afford to run a booth, they would wander the streets, or even walk to other provinces to sell their divination techniques. For example, in the city of Lin'an of the Southern Song dynasty, in addition to various types of divination booth, there also existed many street diviners who walked around the crowded night markets, hawking to promote and sell their divination techniques.³³ In addition, diviners also needed to travel beyond their local neighborhood in order to find more customers.³⁴ In the process of expanding their divination business and enhancing their popularity, many diviners took the initiative or offered a free divination service to establish or strengthen their reputation. The famous Southern Song diviner Liu Shugan 劉樞幹 (1104–1193) from Quzhou 衢州 thus gradually established a reputation in this way, eventually attracting not only local people, but also many who visited Quzhou to inquire about their fate.³⁵ According to the historical records, he learned “hexagram and image

32 For example, in 1076, when the imperial exam (*dabi* 大比) was held, many participants visited Xiangguo Temple to consult one particular diviner, whose mantic techniques were famous, to learn about their prospects. As a result, “his booth was [crowded] like the market” (*qi si ru shi* 其肆如市). “Ding Shi keming 丁湜科名” [Ding Shi’s scholarly honor in the imperial exams], in Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi, zhiding*, juan 7, 1026. Indeed, all officials would pass through the capital city if they were transferred and many of them lived there. These factors attracted diviners from all over the country.

33 “Yeshe 夜市” [Night market], in Wu Zimu, *Mengliang lu*, juan 13, 243.

34 “Wang Jie qi Pei 王節妻裴” [Wang Jie’s wife, née Pei], in Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi, sanzhexin* 三志辛, juan 10, 1464–65. However, even if the diviners traveled to other prefectures and journeyed thousands of miles, unless they could establish a reputation, they might still face the dilemma that “[their] income could not pay for the travel” (*suode bu neng gei lüfei* 所得不能給旅費). “Li Tianyou 李天祐,” in Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi, sanzhexin*, juan 10, 1460–61.

35 Even many non-locals, who were simply passing through, visited there to consult diviners because of their reputation. See “Huang Qiongzhou 黃瓊州,” in Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi, zhigeng* 支庚, juan 3, 1155; “Wang Zidao jidi 王資道及第” [Wang Zidao passes the examinations], in Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi, zhikui* 支癸, juan 10, 1297; “Huang Yan sifa 黃炎

techniques" (*guaying zhi shu* 卦影之術)³⁶ from a divine monk. The locals distrusted his skill initially, so he borrowed the house of an old friend as a venue and offered divination free of charge. When his predictions proved correct, the number of people visiting him for divination gradually increased. Having gained a slight reputation, he set up a booth in the crowded main street of Quzhou city in order to expand his divination business and reputation further. What is more, Liu also took the initiative of visiting one of his fellow townspeople, a certain Mister He 何, who was a student at the imperial academy (*taixuesheng* 太學生) who had temporarily returned to his hometown, and foretold the result of his imperial exams through divination. His action apparently attracted people's attention and, when the student successfully passed the imperial exams as predicted, Liu's accuracy in divination became widely known; "from then on the entrance to his booth was crowded like a market" (*zi ci menting ruo shi* 自此門庭若市).³⁷

In fact, it was usually through their far-reaching reputation that the literati first became aware of individual diviners. Moreover, if a scholar heard of a particular diviner, this was usually also a foreshadowing of their eventual interaction. For example, when the Northern Song Dynasty scholar Wen Tong 文同 (1018–1079) was still in his hometown in Sichuan, he heard that a Daoist called Yuan 袁, who resided one hundred *li* 里 away, could use methods like the "sixty-four-hexagram" (*liushisi gua* 六十四卦)³⁸ or "extrapolate the five elements" (*tui wuxing* 推五行)³⁹ in order accurately to foretell someone's fortune or misfortune. Even though Wen Tong had never met this diviner, he always kept his image in mind. Later, when he moved to the capital to become an official and interacted with other literati, he often heard his friends mentioning a Daoist

司法" [Huang Yan, the administrator in charge of law], in Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi, sanzhi ren*, *juan* 5, 1501; "Zhang Ji quqi 章楫娶妻" [Zhang Ji takes a wife], in Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi, bu*, *juan* 18, 1720.

36 These are two techniques. In the first, a hexagram is produced based on an individual's "eight characters" (*bazi*), while the other uses various images drawn by the practitioner to make predictions. See Liao, "Popular Religion and the Religious Beliefs of the Song Elite," 250.

37 "Liu Shugan defa 劉樞幹得法" [Liu Shugan obtained the Daoist rites], in Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi, sanzhi ren*, *juan* 3, 1484–85. A similar example is the rise of the diviner Jiang Jian 蔣堅, who travelled from Jinling 金陵 to Poyang 鄱陽 to sell his techniques. He also began by "selling [his] practices on the street" (*pan shu yu jie* 盤術於街). Later, after he successfully predicted the fate of famous literati, "they lined up at his door" (*shiren deng qi men ru zhi* 士人登其門如織). "Jiang Jian shi niu 蔣堅食牛" [Jiang Jian eats an oxen], in Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi, zhijia* 支甲, *juan* 10, 788–90.

38 Divination methods based on interpreting the lines and statements of the hexagram.

39 Divination techniques based on analyzing a person's eight characters together with the five elements.

from Sichuan, who was good at using the “line images” (*yaoxiang* 爻象) of a hexagram to detect fortune and misfortune. At that time, he wondered if the Daoist was the same person he had heard about previously. Later, by chance, he met the Daoist and confirmed that he was the same Yuan whom he had heard about before. Therefore, he started to interact with him, bestowed a new courtesy name on him and presented him with a piece of writing (*zengyan* 贈言).⁴⁰ Zhou Zizhi 周紫芝 (1082–1155) and Chen Liang 陳亮 (1143–1194) both became curious and consulted diviners, after they discovered that they possessed “an unusual book” (*yishu* 異書) on mantic arts and had learned the magical technique of hexagram divination.⁴¹ In addition, Wang Tinggui 王庭珪 (1079–1171) had heard of a diviner called Wu 吳, who practiced “five-element divination” (*wuxing bushi* 五行卜筮)⁴² techniques. When he met this diviner by chance at a monk’s house, he immediately questioned him and asked for the diviner’s advice.⁴³ Although, in the above examples, the literati displayed different attitudes when meeting diviners, the reputation of the diviners transmitted via different channels undoubtedly made them aware of the diviner’s existence and was an important factor in contacting them.

From the records passed down to us, written by people at that time, it can be seen that, in the eyes of the literati, diviners and their activities were indeed ubiquitous and could be observed everywhere, as Wang Anshi’s described in his essay. The literati’s eagerness to learn about their future fortune or misfortune helped to expand the diviners’ numbers. The literati also became the diviners’ most important target group for expanding their pool of clients and making their living. In other words, whether the numbers “ten thousand” or “tens of thousands” are consistent with the facts or not, or whether they indicate a true increase in the number of diviners, they certainly reveal the literati’s perception of the changing conditions of diviners as well as their interactions with this group. On the one hand, the literati’s great interest in foreseeing their fortune and misfortune attracted diviners who frequently appeared in their line of sight. On the other hand, it caused the literati to start to pay close attention to the skills and trends within this community. Thus, the size and spread of

40 Wen Tong, “Daoshi Yuan Weizheng Xingzhi xu 道士袁惟正行之序” [Preface to the Daoist Yuan Weizheng (style name) Xingzhi], in *Dan Yuan ji*, juan 26, 7b–9a.

41 Zhou Zizhi, “Xinwei zashu 辛未雜書” [Miscellaneous writings of the (year) *xinwei*], in *Taichang timi ji*, juan 50, 7b–9a; Chen Liang, “Zeng shuzhe Dai sheng xu 贈術者戴生序” [A preface to the diviner Master Dai], in *Longchuan ji*, juan 15, 17b–18a.

42 Divination techniques based on deciphering how the five elements generate or prevail upon each other.

43 Wang Tinggui, “Song buzhe Wu Tangzuo xu 送卜者吳唐佐序” [A preface to the diviner, Wu Tangzuo], in *Luxi wenji*, juan 37, 6a.

the diviners' community were not only Wang Anshi's personal perception, but the common understanding among many literati at that time. Wang Anshi's essay transcends his individual viewpoint and outlines the overall image of the diviners' community from a broader macro perspective. The relevant writings of other literati at that time, on the other hand, add many vivid details to our image of the interactions between literati and diviners, including the locations where the diviners set up their booths and how they displayed their methods and promoted their skills. Moreover, they also indicate how diviners came into contact with the life worlds of the literati, which provided more opportunities for them to establish close relations with this group.

4 Modes of Interaction and Reciprocity

In addition to describing and explaining the increasing number of diviners, Wang Anshi's essay also reveals the interaction and mutual benefit between the literati and diviners. In terms of interaction, the literati mainly consulted diviners about their fate due to concerns about their personal gains and losses. Due to this demand, the number of diviners increased, who actively displayed their skills and sold their techniques to the literati community, resulting in frequent contact and communication between the two parties. In terms of mutually beneficial relationships, by offering their divination and fortune-telling services, diviners not only helped the literati to relieve their anxiety,⁴⁴ but also acquired generous material rewards from them, so both parties enjoyed mutual benefits. This kind of interaction and mutually beneficial relationship not only explains the existence of a considerable number of diviners, but also points to the close interactions between the literati and diviners. Wang Anshi's portrayal is fully substantiated by the writings of other literati at that time, because similar examples of interactions were not only seen everywhere in the literati's community, but were repeatedly mentioned, transmitted and recorded.⁴⁵ However, precisely because the literati were happy to record and

44 In theory, the literati learned of their future prospects through diviners' prognostications, which should have helped to alleviate their anxiety but, in fact, even if informed of their future, most literati remained suspicious and distrusted the results of the prognostication. Moreover, if they became aware of other diviners who were considered more accurate, they would continue to inquire about their fate. However, whether or not diviners truly relieved the literati's anxiety, the contact between the two parties was persistent, and so the reality of their interactions cannot be denied. Liao, "Exploring Weal and Woe," 347–95.

45 Liao, "Xiantan, jishi yu duihua," 387–418.

transmit their own or others' experiences of divination, we can see from their individual narratives that the interaction and mutually beneficial relationships between the literati and diviners involved even more forms and more complex factors. While these diverse factors support the description in Wang's essay, they also disclose other scenarios of communication between the literati and diviners that cannot be ignored and deserve careful observation and analysis.

The interaction between the literati and diviners may be attributable to many different factors. In addition to the aforementioned pursuit of fame and fortune through an official career, two further motivations were unique to the community of literati. One resulted from their curiosity about mantic practices of that time and how they worked. The literati had close contact with various diviners and attempted to understand the theoretical and logical basis of their prognostications. This kind of knowledge orientation was more evident during the Southern Song Dynasty. The close contact between the scholar Wen Tianxiang 文天祥 (1236–1283) and diviners at the end of the Song Dynasty is an outstanding example. Many literati interacted with diviners due to their interest in high status or fortune or misfortune, but Wen Tianxiang displayed no such interest. What really attracted him was his realization that the logic of mantic practices might be used as a key for understanding the mandate of heaven. Thus, he took the opportunity to interact with diviners, and carefully observed their logic and secrets.⁴⁶ Another reason for interacting with diviners was to promote and defend a Confucian "view of fate" (*mingguan* 命觀). Diviners mingled with the community of literati and had a wide network of contacts. Therefore, the literati could not only express their personal views through writings presented to the diviners, but could thereby also transmit them to other potential literati customers who might come into contact with the diviners. This aspect is also often seen in the writings of Southern Song Dynasty literati. In the interaction between Zhen Dexiu 真德秀 (1178–1235) and diviners, we can observe such motives. He regarded the writings that he presented to diviners as a gift as a platform for conveying messages because, at that time, diviners always used the writings that they had received from one scholar as a stepping stone to visit their next potential customer. Therefore, Zhen tried to promote a Confucian conception of life and human nature in such writings. In that way, not only would his writings be read by many literati subsequently, but he was also able to persuade and influence them in this way.⁴⁷

46 Liao, "Exploring the Mandates of Heaven."

47 Liao, "Zhengxue yu xiaodao."

However, the interaction between the literati and diviners was not entirely different from that between commoners and diviners. In fact, most literati, similarly to commoners, encountered various life-related problems and perplexities, which they brought to diviners, seeking answers. One's predestined lifespan, for example, was a common focus, shared by all social classes. Some literati paid equal attention to their lifespan as to their future official career. Therefore, they would raise these questions together when consulting diviners.⁴⁸ There were also some literati who had already secured wealth and rank, so their main concern now became their lifespan. For example, during the Northern Song Dynasty, Li Duanyi 李端懿 (1013–1060) and his brother were granted official status from a young age and smoothly ascended up the ranks because they were related to the royal clan. Therefore, they did not need to worry about the gain and loss of their official title, rank or wealth.⁴⁹ Accordingly, when they consulted diviners, they said “[W]e’re not worried about fortune and nobility, but only ask about the length of our lifespan” (富貴吾不憂，但問壽幾何).⁵⁰ In addition, the literati sought out diviners due to common problems that were also encountered by ordinary people. These included obtaining information about missing relatives, finding lost property,⁵¹ having offspring and their future prospects,⁵² the healing of disease,⁵³ and even the choice of a son-in-law.⁵⁴ Hence, although the literati were distinct in terms of their

48 For example, in his response to Shen Gou 沈遘 (1025–1067), the monk Wenjie 文捷 included both Shen's official career prospects as well as his predicted life expectancy. Obviously, the latter must have inquired about these two issues. “Shenqi 神奇” [Marvellous (events)], in Shen Gou, *Mengxi bitan*, juan 20, 9a–10b.

49 Their mother was the younger sister of the Zhenzong 真宗 Emperor (r. 997–1022) of the Northern Song Dynasty. Therefore, at the age of seven, they were awarded the title of Vice Commissioner of the Capital, and served the heir apparent of the Eastern Palace. As a consequence, they could access the forbidden palace, like family members. As adults, they were also appointed to many positions at both the central and regional levels.

50 “Li Duanyi Duanyuan wen buren shou 李端懿端愿問卜人壽” [Li Duanyi and (Li) Duanyuan ask diviner about their life spans], in Wu Zeng, *Nenggai zhai manlu*, juan 13, 113.

51 Wang Zhi, *Mo ji*, juan 2, 29–31; “Sheng qi niang 聖七娘” [Holy seventh madam], in Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi, zhijing* 支景, juan 5, 919; “Hou langzhong 侯郎中” [Director Hou], in Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi, bu*, juan 18, 1718–19; “Xia Juyuan,” 1003–4.

52 Li Xinchuan, *Jiwen zhengwu*, juan 2, 36. Yuan Shushan, *Zhongguo lidai buren zhuan*, juan 11, 363; “Huang shanren 黃山人” [The hermit Huang], in Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi, jia* 甲, juan 8, 69–70.

53 Zhang Shizheng, *Juanyou zalu*, 38; Peng Cheng, *Moke huixi*, juan 6, 1b–2a; “Suoyi xiansheng 蓑衣先生” [Mr. Straw Rain Cape], in Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi, bu*, juan 12, 1657–60; Wei Tai, *Dongxuan bilu*, juan 11, 129.

54 Yuan Shushan, *Zhongguo lidai buren zhuan*, juan 29, 978.

knowledge and status, the problems they encountered were not totally different from those of other customers.

Against this background, the question arises: how did diviners at that time respond to the literati specifically and form an interactive, mutually beneficial relationship with them? If we examine the market of divination and fortune-telling at the time, it was obviously not big enough for diviners to focus solely on serving one community and ignore other potential customers.⁵⁵ After all, every customer who visited them brought in an income that was essential for diviners' survival. Therefore, most of their strategies for dealing with clients did not deliberately differentiate between different customer types, but they provided fortune-telling services that were available to all. However, because of the literati's special appeal, diviners had to work hard to respond to the special demands of this group and so successfully widen their pool of literati clients.

First of all, to address the literati's specific demands linked to their pursuit of an official career, diviners usually had to do a lot of homework to make their predictions appear convincing to the literati. This homework included mastering, to a certain degree, the implications of the examination system, the time and place of the exams, the locations of the school buildings and examination halls, as well as the ways in which officials could advance in officialdom. If diviners were unfamiliar with the basic information about official careers, they would not only very easily lose the decisive, rare opportunity to display and sell their techniques to the literati, but their predictions might also be unrelated to the system and spatial circumstances at that time, and hence they might be questioned and mocked by the literati, or their reputation might even be ruined so that they could not continue to earn their living through mantic arts.⁵⁶

55 In particular, when the number of diviners reached "ten thousand" or "tens of thousands", one can well imagine the intense competition in the fortune-telling market. It was obviously unwise to ignore potential customers.

56 There are examples of literati "angrily criticizing their absurdities" (*tongdi qi wang* 痛詆其妄), "in great anger, wanting to punish them (the diviners)" (*danu, yu zhi zhi* 大怒, 欲治之), or "waving their long sleeves and leaving in great anger" (*danu, fuyi er qu* 大怒, 拂衣而去). They also asked diviners "What sense does it make for someone to finish in the top ranks [of the examinations] and still have to wait for a long time [to be appointed]?" (*wuyou zai kuijia er xu jiu ci zhi li* 烏有在魁甲而需久次之理). (This relates to the story of Wang Zidao 王資道. A diviner told him that he would pass the exams, but had to wait a decade for an official career. He was incredulous and responded in the afore-mentioned manner. In the event, he did pass the exams, but failed to embark on an official career for a decade, due to a series of family issues.) These examples show that, when a diviner's predictions contradicted the process of becoming an official, it could not

Secondly, concerning the literati's interest in the theory and logic of mantic arts, the divination practitioners had to have some knowledge or eloquence similar to the literati in order to respond to their questions and challenges successfully. Given that the literati were curious about the *modus operandi* of the mantic arts and fortune-telling, they would certainly ask various questions that interested them, and might even question or debate with the diviner. For example, Wen Tianxiang not only observed and tested for many years a well-known diviner who engaged in glyphomancy (*chaizishu* 拆字術), but also directly questioned him. Thus, Wen asked how the diviner could know the future of a client from a character that had been randomly drawn or written. His questions ran as follows: in the Confucian classics, it is written that "one shall be able to know in advance when a misfortune or fortune is coming" (*huofu jiang zhi, bi xian zhi zhi* 禍福將至，必先知之). Accordingly, if one writes a character, "what one has grasped in the mind, will be reflected by the hand" (*de yu xin, ying yu shou* 得於心，應於手). According to these theories, it seemed possible to infer a writer's natural talents, conduct, lifespan, and status from his handwriting. However, if the client wrote the character without knowing its purpose and hence did not "grasp it in the mind," how could his/her fortune and misfortune be inferred from the randomly written character?⁵⁷ This question was not easy to answer, because it not only related to the techniques and theories of character deciphering with which the practitioner should be familiar, but also involved Confucian theories that lay beyond the comprehension of the average diviners. Despite this, the practitioner skillfully used the Confucian theories of Shao Yong 邵雍 (1012–1077) to explain

only harm the diviner's credibility immediately, but also invoke a strong rebuke from his client. These records often highlight that diviners' predictions eventually proved correct. However, by that point, many diviners had already been questioned and ridiculed by the literati before they could verify the accuracy of their predictions. As a result, their reputation was severely harmed and they could no longer make a living. "Dao Chang xiang 道昌相" [Dao Chang's practice of physiognomy], in Zhou Hui, *Qingbo zazhi*, *juan* 11, 485–86; "Bian'an rizhe 汴岸日者" [Diviners from the banks of the Bian river], in Chen Hu, *Xitang ji qijiu xuwen*, *juan* 7, 360; "Wang Zidao jidi," 1297. A few exceptions can be found in Chen Liang, "Zeng shuzhe Xuan Dian 贈術者宣顛序" [A preface presented to the diviner Xuan Dian], in *Longchuan ji*, *juan* 15, 16b–17b.

- 57 Wen Tianxiang, "Zeng Yang Dianfeng chaizi xu 贈仰顛峯拆字序" [Preface presented to Yang Dianfeng in honor of his character deciphering (skills)], in *Wenshan xiansheng quanji*, *juan* 9, 329–30. Some practitioners of the character deciphering techniques indeed adopted the theory that "handwriting is drawn from the heart" (*shu, xin hua ye* 書，心畫也), believing that a righteous heart was manifested in righteous handwriting. For them, people's nature could be observed from their handwriting. Wang Tinggui, "Zeng You sheng xiangzi xu 贈尤生相字序" [A preface presented (in honor) of Mister You's character deciphering (skills)], in *Luxi wenji*, *juan* 37, 6b.

the Confucian principles invoked by Wen Tianxiang.⁵⁸ Wen Tianxiang did not fully understand, but no longer questioned his mantic arts thenceforth. Such interaction could occur not only because some diviners strove to understand Confucianism in order to attract literati clients, but also because many diviners themselves had a Confucian background.⁵⁹

The third problem that diviners faced was how to interact with and mutually benefit from the literati, who were seeking to promote and defend Confucian ideas. Possessing the above-mentioned Confucian knowledge and eloquence should have been a favorable condition for diviners facing such literati. However, a more common response was to build up a broad network within the literati community, in order not only to open up their own market of fortune-telling, but also to provide a platform for the literati to interact and exchange and transmit various messages. They regarded all kinds of literati as potential customers, found opportunities to visit them to display and sell their mantic arts, or even requested gift writings. This unremitting self-promotion, although not necessarily convincing to the other party, often led to a sympathetic understanding and even the receipt of gift writings. For example, many literati often received “requests for a poem” (*qiu shi* 求詩) or “requests for a writing” (*qing yan* 請言) after the diviners had visited them and displayed their mantic arts.⁶⁰ In addition to expressing their gratitude and appreciation from

58 According to Wen Tianxiang, the practitioner’s response was as follows: “That is not the case. Every prognostication of fortune and calamity in the world is derived solely from movement. Kangjie 康節 (Shao Yong) could not explore [the principle underlying] the flourishing and withering of trees through their stillness. A single leaf falls and gives rise to methods of prediction. People have witnessed falling leaves countless times, but few knew of the great transformation manifest in this insignificantly small thing. Your observation of a character is based on the mind [of the writer]; mine is based on the movement of the mind [of the writer].” (未也，天下禍福之占，於其動而已。木之榮枯，康節不能索之於其靜。一葉之墜，算法生焉。世人見墜葉多矣，誰知大化，寄此眇末。子之觀字也，於其心，某之觀字也，於其心之動。) Wen Tianxiang, “Zeng Yang Dianfeng chaizi xu,” 329–30.

59 For example, Wang Tinggui once presented prefaces to five diviners separately, at least three of whom had originally been Confucian-educated. Wang Tinggui 王庭珪, “Song Liu Desheng xu 送劉得昇序” [A preface presented to Liu Desheng], in *Luxi wenji*, juan 36, 8a–b; Wang, “Zeng Raozi xu 贈饒子序” [Preface presented to Raozi], in *Luxi wenji*, juan 37, 3a–b; Wang, “Song buzhe Wu Tangzuo xu 送卜者吳唐佐序” [Preface presented to the diviner of Wu Tangzuo], in *Luxi wenji*, juan 37, 6b. For a discussion of the Confucian background of diviners and the phenomenon of “abandoning Confucianism to practice divination” (*qi Ru cong bu* 棄儒從卜), see Liao, “Ti yan ‘xiao dao’”

60 Zhen Dexiu, “Zeng Yue xiangshi 贈岳相師” [(A writing) presented to the divination master Zhen Yue], in *Xishan xiansheng Zhen Wenzhong gong wenji*, juan 1, 55; He Menggui, “Zeng Li Jinglei xu 贈李景雷序” [Preface presented to Li Jinglei], in *Qianzhai ji*, juan 5, 4b–5a;

a beneficiary's position, the literati often presented the diviners with poems or prefaces due to other factors, such as a form of payment,⁶¹ to express friendship among fellows from the same native-place,⁶² or to express sympathy about the diviner's struggle to make a living.⁶³ Due to the complex reasons for their compositions, the contents of these gift writings were, of course, accordingly diverse: they include everything from praise of the diviner's techniques,⁶⁴ highlighting their special character,⁶⁵ polite encouragement,⁶⁶ narratives completely unrelated to diviners or mantic arts,⁶⁷ to emphasizing the principles of Confucianism and its superior status.⁶⁸ As for the diviners who received these writings, although this positive show of appreciation helped to spread their reputation and develop the market, possessing gift essays by literati was an important asset *per se*. These writings were concrete proofs of the diviner's connections with the literati community, and also important "endorsements"

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- Zhou Bida, "Shu shi Linchuan Chen Hui 書示臨川陳摛" [A letter to instruct Chen Hui from Linchuan], in *Wenzhong ji*, *juan* 55, 17b–18a.
- 61 Wen Tianxiang, "Yu qianren (Xunzhai Ouyang xiansheng) 與前人 (巽齋歐陽先生)" [A (writing) presented to the previously mentioned person (Mister Xunzhai Ouyang)], in *Wenshan xiansheng quanji*, *juan* 5, 143–44.
- 62 Wen Tianxiang, "Zeng Huang Lin Cuiwei xu 贈黃璘翠微序" [A preface presented to Huang Lin (alias) Cuiwei], in *Wenshan xiansheng quanji*, *juan* 9, 329.
- 63 Wen Tianxiang, "Yu qianren," 142–43.
- 64 Wei Liaoweng, "Zeng Zizhong Wang Yanzheng fengshui shuo 贈資中王彥正風水說" [An exploration of geomancy presented to Wang Yanzheng of Zizhong county], in *Heshan xiansheng daquan wenji*, *juan* 92, 774; Yao Mian, "Zeng Yang Dianfeng xiansheng erzi shuo 贈仰顛峯先生二字說" [An exploration of the two characters presented to Master Yang Dianfeng], in *Xuepo ji*, *juan* 40, 8b–9b.]
- 65 Sun Yingshi, "Zeng rizhe Huang Pu xu 贈日者黃朴序" [Preface presented to the diviner Huang Pu], in *Zhuhu ji*, *juan* 10, 4b–5b; Wen Tianxiang, "Zeng Cao Zizheng jianke xu 贈曹子政劍客序" [Preface presented to the swordsman Cao Zizheng], in *Wenshan xiansheng quanji*, *juan* 9, 328.
- 66 Wei Liaoweng, "Zeng taisu Chen Chun 贈太素陳純" [(A writing) presented to the *taisu* (master) Chen Chun], in *Heshan xiansheng daquan wenji*, *juan* 92, 775. (Translators note: *Taisu* is a method for prognosticating nobility, fortune and misfortune through analyzing changes in the human pulse).
- 67 Xie Fangde, "Zeng xiangshi Guo Shaoshan 贈相士郭少山" [(A writing) presented to the physiognomer Guo Shaoshan], in *Dieshan ji*, *juan* 1, 4b; Wen Tianxiang, "Zeng Jianhu xiangshi 贈鑑湖相士" [(A writing) presented to the physiognomer from Jianhu], in *Wenshan xiansheng quanji*, *juan* 1, 9; Xiong He, "Zeng Xiong Yunxiu xia xingshu yuanyou xu 贈熊雲岫挾星術遠遊序" [A preface presented to Xiong Yunxiu who is about to travel far away with astrology skill], in *Wuxuan ji*, *juan* 1, 24a–25a.
- 68 Zhen Dexiu, "Song Zhang Zongchang xu 送張宗昌序" [Preface presented to Zhang Zongchang], in *Xishan xiansheng Zhen Wenzhong gong wenji*, *juan* 29, 499.

that allowed them to continue to expand their pool of customers in other literati communities.⁶⁹

In the afore-mentioned modes of interaction between the literati and diviners, the subsequent mutually beneficial relationship between these two communities can be clearly observed, which went far beyond tangible rewards, such as the honor and fame of an official career or the material interests mentioned in Wang Anshi's essay. First of all, for the literati, mantic arts played a role in relieving their concerns and resolving their hardships. They not only helped them to predict their prospective honor and fortune in their official career, but also provided guidance on many life issues. This kind of problem-solving, relieving effect was commonly provided by diviners for both the literati and the general population, and was also the function which they continued to live on and promote. In addition, over the course of history, the diviners and the mantic arts they transmitted continued to possess a special significance and intellectually stimulated many literati of the Southern Song Dynasty. Confucian doctrine emphasizes the importance of the heavenly mandate, without clearly indicating how to explore it. Therefore, for some literati, understanding the *modus operandi* of mantic arts appeared to present a potential key to exploring the heavenly mandate. The literati's interaction with diviners and exploration of mantic arts, in addition to bringing the benefits of problem-solving and fortune-seeking, could thus also satisfy their pursuit of knowledge. The interpersonal network formed by the diviners commuting among the literati was also an important platform for the literati to exchange information and promote Confucianism. Wang Anshi regretted that the literati were attracted by diviners and ignored the original meaning of Confucianism. Other Southern Song Dynasty literati could, however, via their interaction with diviners, transmit the Confucian conception of life to other literati who came into contact with diviners, thereby achieving the purpose of promoting and defending the position of Confucianism.

For diviners, interaction with the literati also brought many intangible rewards, which could be more precious than material benefits. If one examines the records left by the literati, the most frequent intangible reward seem to be gift writings.⁷⁰ From the existing collections of writings of many Song dynasty literati, one can see that many of their poems and writings were gifts

69 For the role of endorsements in the literati's writings for diviners, see Liao, "Ti yan 'xiao dao'."

70 In practical terms, people were clearly expected to pay for divination services. However, the literati at that time did not usually discuss fees. Instead, they tended to dedicate poems and essays to diviners, and include these writings in their own collected works.

to both diviners and their peer literati. For example, in Wen Tianxiang's collected works, at least fifty poems and essays were presented to various mantic arts practitioners, such as geomancy practitioners and fortune-tellers.⁷¹ Yao Mian 姚勉 (1216–1262) presented poems to at least twenty-two different practitioners of mantic arts in addition to a few prefaces.⁷² These gift writings were partly the initiative of the literati, while others were written in response to the diviners' requests. Some literati composed gift writings because they could not afford to pay the diviners, and so offered poems or essays as an alternative. This is clearly conveyed by the following example: "The skills [of the diviner] are so brilliant that their prize is difficult to repay. The requested poem, [on the other hand], is equivalent to a thousand pieces of gold" (*shu gaojia nan chou, suo shi di qianjin* 術高價難酬，索詩抵千金).⁷³ Some diviners considered the literati's writings more thoughtful and valuable, so they requested poetry or writings. This can be seen in the following passage: "[I] have heard that material rewards are not comparable to your honor's poems" (曾聞物外償，不若君家詩).⁷⁴ Such gift writings often matched the diviners' own requests for poetry or writings. No matter who took the initiative, the literati's gift writings had a special significance for diviners. They were proof that the diviners had entered the network of literati and gained their approval. They were also an important key to promoting their reputation further and expanding their pool of literati customers.

Through careful observation of the interaction and mutually beneficial relationship between the literati and diviners, one can observe that the diviners spread due to the literati's feelings on the spot as well as their strong demand, but also because diviners took the opportunity to establish connections within the literati community. The interaction between the two parties served to solve problems and relieve worries as well as exchange and explore knowledge. Furthermore, it provided a platform for interpersonal interaction and knowledge transmission. Developing and maintaining this interaction not simply was predicated on a straightforward supply-demand relationship, with the literati consulting diviners, but required that both parties have a certain degree of mutual understanding during the process. For the literati, only by knowing

71 Liao, "Exploring the Mandates of Heaven."

72 Bossler, "Yao Mian and the Occult."

73 He Menggui, "Zeng Tang Letian xingweng 贈唐樂天星翁" [(A writing) presented to the astrology master, Tang Letian], in *Qianzhai ji*, *juan* 1, 2a–b. (Translators note: The two parts of this quotation seem to present the perspective of the literatus and the diviner respectively.)

74 Liu Yan, "Zeng xiang zhangwen Liao sheng yi shou 贈相掌文廖生一首" [A poem presented to the chiromancy master Liao], in *Longyun ji*, *juan* 3, 11a–b.

the reputation, ability and location of a diviner could they find someone who could sufficiently solve their problems and soothe their anxiety; whom they could question and debate with when they required knowledge; and who could provide an appropriate platform for defending their Confucian viewpoints. Similarly, diviners needed to be familiar with the literati's concerns, gathering places and networks, so that they could attract and convince literati customers at a favorable time and place regarding topics of interest, and so sustain their position among the literati community. The mutual benefit for the two parties was both tangible and intangible. The predicted honor, fame and fortune or material rewards were the tangible rewards, while the exchange of knowledge and development of an interpersonal network were the intangible ones. These complex, diverse interactions and reciprocal relationships show that the contact between the literati and diviners was not accidental, but a common phenomenon at that time.

5 Social Image and Status

In Wang Anshi's essay, he criticized the widespread distribution of the branches of mantic arts, and expressed deep regret about the omnipresence and attraction of diviners. How representative was such a critical attitude at that time, and how did it affect the social image and status of diviners? This problem may be further explored through the writings of other literati. The above section discussed three ways in which the literati interacted with diviners through their writings and poems. Based on these writings, the following section will further show how the literati described and evaluated mantic arts and their practitioners.

First of all, with regard to seeking help from diviners, one can differentiate two attitudes among the literati. On the one hand, some literati benefited from their services and expressed gratitude to a particular diviner by presenting him with a piece of writing. In particular, the literati praised the ingenuity of the diviner's skills and/or the integrity of his character, as well as the fact that he was able to formulate his predictions in a straightforward manner and they always proved true. These writings reveal the literati's support, praise and even approval. On the other hand, other literati merely described and commented on their peer literati who consulted diviners, from a bystander's perspective. Some of them recorded or transmitted these accounts purely because these topics interested them.⁷⁵ Others believed that they should not

75 In Song Dynasty brush notes, such records are quite common. See Liao, "Xiantan, jishi yu duihua."

place their destiny in the hands of mantic art practitioners, and so criticized or ridiculed the phenomenon of fortune-telling. The above essay by Wang Anshi can be regarded as belonging to this category.⁷⁶ Generally speaking, there were indeed critical voices at the time similar to that of Wang, but the literati who expressed support or recognition were not a minority.

Secondly, we can gain a glimpse into the literati's perception by examining those writings that explore the mechanism and logic of mantic arts. In these writings, we see both criticism and approval, sometimes coexisting in the writings of the same author. Taking Wen Tianxiang as an example, he gave gift writings to four different practitioners of geomancy at different times, and made different comments on them. He criticized one for – in his view – mistakenly equating a successful official career with glory, wealth and rank, believing instead that people who lived in seclusion and enjoyed the pleasures of nature might be those endowed with the blessing of heaven.⁷⁷ The other three diviners were from his native-place and came from families who had engaged in geomancy for generations. They, therefore, received his support and approval. However, his writings show different degrees of appreciation. To a relatively young practitioner of geomancy, he offered advice and encouragement as a senior. He praised a second practitioner's ability to observe the geomorphology of mountains and rivers, and expressed his hope that they would meet again in the future. However, the one whom he approved of and acclaimed the most was the third, who had an outstanding ability to distinguish the topography of mountains and rivers, with whom Wen interacted for over a decade.⁷⁸ By observing the actual topography together with this practitioner, Wen not only corrected his previous misunderstanding of certain geomantic concepts, such as "the treasure lands" (*baodi* 寶地), and his misjudgment of the ability of geomancy practitioners, but was also inspired by their conversations about geomantic theories. In addition, he showed similarly different attitudes in his writings toward several diviners with whom he was in close contact and with whom he inquired into and debated the principles and different views of fate. At the same time as he discovered that it was possible to make accurate

76 A similar example can also be found in Zhou Zizhi, "Xinwei zashu," 7b–9a.

77 Wen Tianxiang, "Zeng Wei shanren 贈魏山人" [(Writing) presented to the hermit Wei], in *Wenshan xiansheng quanji*, *juan* 1, 14.

78 These three persons were Huang Lin 黃璘 (dates unknown), Li Duanji 黎端吉 (dates unknown) and Huang Huanfu 黃煥甫 (dates unknown). Wen Tianxiang, "Zeng Huang Lin Cuiwei xu," 329; Wen, "Yu shanren Li Duanji 與山人黎端吉" [(Writing) presented to the hermit Li Duanji], in *Wenshan xiansheng quanji*, *juan* 9, 322–23; Wen, "Zeng shanren Huang Huanfu 贈山人黃煥甫" [(Writing) presented to the hermit Huang Huanfu], in *Wenshan xiansheng quanji*, *juan* 9, 328–29.

predictions and thus praised a diviner and his fate-calculation book on which his predictions were based, he continued to argue ferociously with another practitioner who made inferences based on astrology,⁷⁹ claiming that his prediction method and arguments were insufficiently credible.⁸⁰

Moreover, even in the writings of the literati who defended the Confucian view of fate, diviners were not always depicted in a negative way; rather, there was both approval and criticism. Often, gift writings feature detailed descriptions of diviners and their expertise, affirming the accuracy of their predictions. On the other hand, these writings often highlight the uniqueness of the practitioner in question through criticizing mantic arts and divination more generally. For example, in a piece of writing presented to a practitioner of “five-element fortune-telling” (*wuxing lunming* 五行論命), Zhen Dexiu, on the one hand, praised him for deducing the five elements according to the “principles” (*li* 理), and displayed an affirmative attitude.⁸¹ On the other hand, Zhen emphasized his difference from other, ordinary diviners by pointing out that one may “not view him as a regular Yin and Yang practitioner” (*wu yi yinyang-zhe liuli ri (mu) zhi* 毋以陰陽者流例曰〔目〕之).⁸² In another example, Zhen’s tone shifted between praise, disappointment, and appreciation, thereby illustrating his multi-faceted image of diviners. Because the diviner in question had thoroughly studied multiple methods of medicine and divination, Zhen Dexiu praised “the richness of his skills” (*shen zai qi fuyi ji ye* 甚哉其富於技也). However, because of the Confucian understanding of divination as a “small way,” he regretted that “for those who follow [the small ways] too far, there is the danger of getting stuck” (*gu bumian zhi yuan kong ni zhi ji* 固不免至遠恐泥之譏). Nevertheless, he did not completely reject the value of divination. After personally experiencing the accuracy of the diviner’s skills, he emphasized that one should not scorn the diviner’s techniques and questioned whether “it can be discarded [only] because it is a small way?” (*qi keyi xiaodao fei zhi hu*

79 Wen Tianxiang, “Zeng tanming Zhu Dounan xu 贈談命朱斗南序” [Preface presented to diviner Zhu Dounan], in *Wenshan xiansheng quanji*, juan 9, 326.

80 Wen Tianxiang, “Song Peng Shuying xu 送彭淑英序” [Preface presented to Peng Shuying], in *Wenshan xiansheng quanji*, juan 9, 321–22; Wen, “Ba Peng Shuying tanming lu 跋彭淑英談命錄” [Postscript to the collection of Peng Shuying’s discussions of fate], in *Wenshan xiansheng quanji*, juan 10, 349–50. For details of the interaction between Wen Tianxiang and the two diviners, see Liao, “Exploring the Mandates of Heaven.”

81 Given that Zhen Dexiu was an ardent proponent of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi’s learning, the word *li* 理 that he employs here probably referred to “the moral pattern of heaven, earth and humanity,” first explicated by Cheng Yi, followed by Zhu Xi. For the transformation of *li* 理, see Smith, Bol, Adler, and Wyatt, *Sung Dynasty Uses of the I Ching*, 257.

82 Zhen Dexiu, “Zeng wuxing Ren jun Bing 贈五行任君炳” [Preface to the Five Element (master) Ren Bing], in *Xishan xiansheng Zhen Wenzhong gong wenji*, juan 35, 554.

其可以小道廢之乎？) In the end, he praised the diviner for diligently teaching his son and inducing him to seek a Confucian teacher. He happily interpreted this move as “a joyful change from [divination] techniques to Confucianism” (*shi jiang bian fangji wei Ruzhe zhi men, you kexi ye* 是將變方技為儒者之門，又可喜也).⁸³

Lastly, we can detect both the critical and the affirmative attitude of many literati in their engagement with the mantic literature of the time. First of all, the content of certain fate-calculation books (*mingshu* 命書) attracted criticism by the literati. Through editing and revising them, they hoped to remove the inadequate parts in order to dispel people's doubts and contribute to the spread of morality. For example, some literati criticized these books for containing “base and shallow theories that have been recklessly added by mediocre and preposterous people” (*bei yongmiu zhi liu, wang zeng weilou zhi shuo* 被庸謬之流，妄增猥陋之說),⁸⁴ or argued “that they were deficient due to their disorder” (*bing qi wuza* 病其蕪雜).⁸⁵ Hence, they wanted to “remove the heterodox and absurd passages” (*qu qi xiedan zhi yan* 去其邪誕之言), so that people “would not be deluded by strange theories and indulge in heretical ways” (*bu huo yu yishuo, bu ni yu taqi* 不惑於異說，不溺於他岐).⁸⁶ Thereby, they aimed to transform them into “Confucian writings” (*Ruzhe zhi yan* 儒者之言)⁸⁷ or “books that illuminate principles” (*mingli zhi shu* 明理之書).⁸⁸ This is why they revised those books. Secondly, however, many literati wrote prefaces and postscripts to the relevant works, or even edited them out of appreciation and approval. This indicates that they not only maintained a considerable degree of communication and interaction with the practitioners, but also that they recommended and endorsed their fate-calculation books. For example, Wen Tianxiang once enthusiastically revised a diviner's book, believing that it could greatly increase the accuracy of previous fortune-telling books from eighty percent to ninety-seven-ninety-eight percent. He believed

83 Zhen Dexiu, “Song Zhang Zongchang xu,” 449.

84 Wu Cheng, “*Zangshu* zhu xu 葬書注序” [Preface to the commentary on *The Book of Burial*], in *Wu Wenzheng ji*, *juan* 23, 12a–b.

85 Cai Yuanding 蔡元定 (1135–1198) was reported to have deleted more than half of *The Book of Burial* due to its heterogeneity. Yong Rong, Ji Yun et al., *Zangshu*, 1a–2b.

86 Ke Shangqian, “*Zhouli tongjin xulun* 周禮通今續論” [Continued discussion on the past and present of the *Rites of the Zhou*], in *Zhouli quanjing shiyuan*, 17a–b.

87 Zhu Yizun, “*Dili jing xu* 地理徑序” [Preface to the *Path to Geomancy*], in *Pushu ting ji*, *juan* 35, 14a–15a.

88 Ouyang Shoudao, “*Zeng Song Yifu xu* 贈宋義甫序” [Preface presented to Song Yifu], in *Xunzhai wenji*, *juan* 11, 6b–8b. For the meaning of *li* 理, see footnote 81.

that by unifying the editing style of the old and new books, they could become more convenient and complementary in their applications.⁸⁹

The above discussion shows that Wang Anshi's criticism and concern regarding the proliferation of the different factions of mantic arts and the omnipresence of their practitioners only conveys part of the literati's perception at the time. Although many believed that various aspects relating to mantic arts and their practitioners were indeed worthy of criticism, there were also many aspects worthy of appreciation. These different attitudes of criticism and approval did not reflect the viewpoints of two opposing groups of literati, who each held exclusive, distinct opinions, because they often coexisted in writings by the same scholar. It is more likely that the literati adopted different standpoints flexibly, depending on the occasion or their specific aim. Most of them would not hesitate to express appreciation and recognize the positive value of diviners and their mantic arts in terms of relieving anxiety, stimulating knowledge, and transmitting information. However, if the literati discovered that certain diviners were simply flattering them for profit and appreciation, that the theories on which their predictions operated were unaligned with common sense and logic, or even when their knowledge was insufficiently profound, they would criticize them relentlessly. The literati's approval deserves special attention, however, as their criticism and depreciation of mantic arts were continuous since the Han dynasty. The literati's close interaction with and open support and approval of diviners, on the other hand, became a widespread phenomenon only in the Song dynasty. This positive evaluation allowed diviners, who had become gradually marginalized in the political and academic sphere, to reverse and elevate their social status and image to a certain degree.

At last, we can return to the example of Wang Anshi and reconsider the criticism and concern visible in his essay. Do these represent his overall attitude toward diviners and mantic arts? First, this kind of criticism not only appeared in this essay, but can also be seen in his other writings. A relatively obvious example is an essay named "Retort on fortune-telling" ("Tuiming dui 推命對"),⁹⁰ which recounts how other people twice suggested to him that he

89 Wen Tianxiang, "Zeng tanming Zhu Dounan xu," 326.

90 It is difficult to determine the date of this essay. Neither Li Deshen's *Wang Anshi shiwen xinian* nor Liu Chengguo's *Wang Anshi nianpu changbian* date it, while Li Zhiliang's 李之亮, dated it to the eighth year of the Qingli 慶曆 (1075). However, because Li Zhiliang also dated "Bian shuo 汴說" to the eighth year of the Qingli 慶曆 reign, which differs from the date of the third year of Qingli given by Li Deshen and Liu Chengguo, the date when "Retort on Fortune-telling" was written may require further examination and verification. See Li Zhiliang, *Wang Jingong wenji jianzhu*, vol. 2, *juan* 33, 1128–1129, 1132.

should consult a reclusive scholar (*chushi* 處士) who was good at fate analysis (*tuiming* 推命) about his status and fortune, but Wang declined. The second time he declined, he explained his reasons for doing so to his interlocutor:

Whether one's noble or lowly is heaven's doing. Whether one's worthy or unworthy, [on the other hand], depends on one's own actions. I can know my own actions, [but] am I the only one who's ignorant about heaven's doings? If I'm worthy, may I be placed in a high position and then inevitably receive a high salary? If I'm unfortunate, poor and lowly due to the circumstances, [does this imply] that I'm unworthy and may not be placed in a high position? If that was the case, then I'd rather eat simple, coarse food without feeling regret. If I'm wealthy and noble due to luck, then this's wrong. I know these things without a doubt, so what need is there to follow one of those [fortune-tellers]? Moreover, a superior man does not take fortune and misfortune into consideration. The superior man is always benevolent in his position and righteous in his conduct. Never would he go against benevolence and righteousness to become wealthy. If, [on the contrary], he would become miserable by being benevolent and righteous, he wouldn't care the least. It is for this reason that King Wen was detained at Youli and Confucius was trapped in Kuang. How was it possible that they, possessing the wisdom of the sages, could not escape misery and suffering? It is because there is the Dao in it.⁹¹

夫貴若賤，天所為也。賢不肖，吾所為也。吾所為者，吾能知之；天所為者，吾獨懵乎哉？吾賢歟？可以位公卿歟？則萬鍾之祿固有焉。不幸而貧且賤，則時也。吾不賢歟？不可以位公卿歟？則簞食豆羹無歉焉。若幸而富且貴，則咎也。此吾知之無疑，奚率於彼者哉？且禍與福，君子置諸外焉。君子居必仁，行必義，反仁義而福，君子不有也。由仁義而禍，君子不屑也。是故文王拘羑里，孔子畏於匡，彼聖人之智，豈不能脫禍患哉？蓋道之存焉耳。

He based his reasoning mainly on the Confucian view of fortune, and the status and role attributed to the mandate of heaven. One's fortune and status were the workings of the mandate of heaven and not of any concern to the virtuous person. Therefore, there was no need to consult fortune-tellers. The only thing individuals could control was their own virtue. Hence, only by striving to take benevolence and righteousness as the standards for one's behavior

91 Wang Anshi, "Tuiming dui 推命對" [Retort on divination], in *Linchuan wenji*, juan 70, 3a-4b.

and cultivating oneself to await the heavenly mandate was one conforming to the correct path.

In response, Wang's interlocutor asked why many sages throughout history had been in humble positions while the unworthy enjoyed high rank and status. In response to this, Wang not only re-emphasized his dedication to the Confucian viewpoint, but also criticized the absurd, illusory nature of fortune-telling practices:

The heavenly mandate is consistent, but people's situation may not always conform to it. Therefore, the superior man who cultivates himself to await [his] mandate and who preserves the Dao to serve [in office] during his time, will not be dispirited by the fleetingness of status and fortune. If you do not dedicate yourself to benevolence and righteousness and have faith in them, but urgently seek pleasure in such absurd, deceitful, illusory, strange theories, then are you not already lost?⁹²

蓋天之命一，而人之時不能率合焉。故君子脩身以俟命，守道以任時，貴賤禍福之來，不能沮也。子不力於仁義以信其中，而厲厲焉甘意於誕謾虛怪之說，不已溺哉！

Apparently, in his essay "Retort on Fortune-telling," Wang Anshi also firmly upheld the Confucian view of fate. However, if one carefully analyzes his life, we find that, while he adhered to the Confucian notion of fate, he was in fact also similar to the literati whom he criticized. He consulted diviners multiple times to predict the future, and maintained close interaction and mutually beneficial relationships with many diviners. For example, from the existing historical data, we know that he consulted several people, including Li Shining 李士寧 (dates unknown),⁹³ Xu Shouxin,⁹⁴ the monk Zhiyuan 智緣 (dates unknown),⁹⁵ and the monk Huacheng, about his physiognomy and fate. Moreover, his questions not only concerned his own fortune and status, but also the fate of his family members. Among them, Li Shining and Monk Huacheng, in particular, had closer interactions with him. The former lived in his house for six months and also received a poem from him in which he expressed his appreciation

92 Ibid. Wang Anshi's arguments for upholding a Confucian view of fate, that he presented in the two essays "Bian shuo" and "Tuiming dui," were highly praised by the Southern Song scholar, Huang Zhen 黃震 (1212–1280). See Huang Zhen, *Huang shi richao*, juan 64, 16b.

93 Sima Guang, *Sushui jiwen*, juan 16, 320–21; Wei Tai, *Dongxuan bilu*, juan 5, 54.

94 Zhu Yi et al., *Xujing chonghe xiansheng Xu Shenweng yulu*, 617.

95 Zhuang Chuo, *Jile bian*, juan 1, 6; Wang Anshi, "Yu Miaoying dashi shuo 與妙應大師說" [An exploration addressed to Master Miaoying], in *Linchuan wenji*, juan 71, 19b–20a.

and gratitude.⁹⁶ Their close relationship is further substantiated by the fact that the anti-Wang Anshi group almost framed Li Shining for a crime.⁹⁷ Several brush notes also indicate that Wang's relationship with the monk Huacheng was rather unusual. According to the records of Hou Yanqing 侯延慶 (*jìnshi* 進士 of 1115), during the Yuanfeng 元豐 reign (1078–1085), Wang Anshi summoned Huacheng to inquire about his fate and whether he should resign from an important position: "Huacheng's residence is close; please summon him here" (*Huacheng zhuchu zai jin, ke ling hulai* 化成住處在近，可令呼來).⁹⁸ This sentence reveals that Wang Anshi clearly knew where well-known diviners lived at the time. Huacheng replied: "[T]hirty years ago I foretold your honor's fate, and now you are in the position of prime minister (*zaixiang* 宰相), what is there left to ask for?" (三十年前與相公看命，今仕至宰相，更復何問?)⁹⁹ This answer reveals that Wang Anshi and Huacheng were old acquaintances. Not only had Wang consulted Huacheng thirty years previously, but the latter's prediction also proved true. One scholar believes that this account is "purely fictional" (*chun wei xiaoshuo jia yan* 純為小說家言).¹⁰⁰ However, Wang Anshi indeed had extensive contact with fortune-tellers. Moreover, the way in which his summoning of fortune-tellers is described is also consistent with the circumstances at that time. In addition, the author, Hou Yanqing, pointed out the source of this event at the end of the essay, which was Liu Wen 劉問 (dates unknown), son of Liu Guan 劉瑄 (dates unknown), who was one of the protagonists in the anecdote. Hence, it is very difficult to conclude that this is a fictitious event.

96 Wang Anshi, "Ji Li Shining xiansheng 寄李士寧先生" [(A poem) sent to Mister Li Shining], in Li Bi, *Wang Jinggong shi zhu*, *juan* 19, 10a–b; Wang Anshi, "Zeng Li Shining daoren 贈李士寧道人" [(A poem) presented to the Daoist Li Shining], in Li Bi, *Wang Jinggong shi zhu*, *juan* 38, 6a–7b. In addition, Wang Anshi, like many literati, presented a poem to the diviner Cheng Weixiang 程惟象 who was active during the Yingzong 英宗 period (1063–1067). See Wang Anshi, "Ciyun pingfu zeng Sanling Cheng Weixiang 次韻平甫贈三靈程惟象" [(A poem) presented to Cheng Weixiang from Sanling using (Wang) Pingfu's rhyming words], in Li Bi, *Wang Jinggong shi zhu*, *juan* 31, 2a–3a.

97 Wei Tai, *Dongxuan bili*, *juan* 5, 54; Jiang Shaoyu, *Huangchao leiyuan*, *juan* 71, 3a–3b. For a discussion of this event, see Masaaki Chikusa, "Sō dai no jutsushi to shidaifu," 479–93.

98 Hou Yanqing, *Tuizhai bilu*, 106–7. This note is also included in the following works from the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties: Tao Zongyi, *Shuo fu*, *juan* 37, 61b–62a; Peng Dayi, "Qu yi ji zao 去宜及早" [If one is going, it is better to set off as soon as possible], in *Shantang si kao*, *juan* 165, 58b–59a; He Liangjun, *Siyou zhai congshuo*, *juan* 31, 3a; Pan Yongyin, *Songbai leichao*, *juan* 23, 17b–18a. However, the versions included in the latter three are simpler and do not contain this sentence.

99 Hou Yanqing, *Tuizhai bilu*, 106–7.

100 Liu Chengguo, *Wang Anshi nianpu changbian*, vol. 5, *juan* 6, 1933–34.

Obviously, when Wang Anshi was facing diviners on all sides, he did not merely uphold Confucianism and indignantly criticize mantic arts. Like many literati at the time, he also interacted with diviners and expressed his approval. When he criticized diviners and mantic arts, Confucianism usually provided his theoretical basis and the principles for his actions. In his interactions with diviners, he often sought their help to resolve his doubts and relieve his stress. They could even become friends, with whom he interacted regularly. Whether his attitude was critical or affirmative seems to have been dictated by the situation. For example, in his essay "On Bian," his critical attitude might indicate his regret that Confucianism was even less attractive than mantic arts. Hence, it might have been due to his over confidence and ambition to put the state in order when he first embarked on an official career. Moreover, at the court of Emperor Renzong (r. 1022–1063), Confucianism and mantic arts tended to become separated, which was perhaps another influencing factor. At that time, many literati advocated pragmatic political actions when faced with disasters, instead of resorting to mantic arts or prayer,¹⁰¹ and later even the summoning of diviners or fortune-tellers was used as the grounds to impeach officials.¹⁰² The reasons why Wang contacted diviners and even interacted with them closely were similar to those of many other literati at the time, including peeping into his own and his family's future, and seeking guidance from time to time, when perplexed. In other words, Wang Anshi's treatment of diviners and mantic arts should not be considered a special case, but was relatively standard at that time.

6 Concluding Remarks

The above shows that the literati still upheld the Confucian position and criticized mantic arts from time to time. However, their close interaction with diviners not only changed the latter's image and social status, but also indirectly reveals the subtle changes that occurred within the knowledge classification and recognition of the literati. In the literati's writings, diviners were often described as sages who possessed insights into the future. These diviners, who were skilled at mantic arts and omnipresent in the Song dynasty, could provide guidance on crucial issues and, in terms of knowledge, could relate

101 Chen Kanli, *Ruxue, shushu yu zhengzhi*, 271.

102 For example, the various issues that the Palace Censor, Zhao Bian 趙抃 (1008–1084), used to impeach Chen Zhizhong 陳執中 (990–1059) included his close contact with diviners who were skilled at predicting disasters, fortune and misfortune. Li Tao, *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian*, juan 178, 7b–8a.

to the concept of the prognostication of the heavenly will. Therefore, they became frequent visitors to the literati. The literati contacted and even consulted diviners about their fate mostly because they were attracted by their reputation for accuracy, besides occasional encounters and the fact that diviners often took the initiative to visit the literati at their home. They cared about the diviners' ability to peep into the future, rather than their background or knowledge. Therefore, one often sees, in the historical materials, the literati praising general diviners more than Confucian-born fortune-tellers. Many literati were willing to provide not only generous material rewards, but also gift essays and other types of spiritual recognition to reward diviners for their fortune-telling services and sharing their fortune-telling theories. Moreover, the literati often maintained close contact with diviners in real life and even included them in their own social network. These actions allowed diviners not only to win various forms of rewards, but also to merge into the social network of the literati, become members of their community and access channels for information exchange. Thus, diviners gained an opportunity to expand their market and elevate their social status.

The literati's interaction with diviners, appreciation, exploration and criticism of mantic arts, and anxiety about Confucianism's loss of status also show that they were gradually reconsidering how mantic arts were classified within the overall knowledge system. Several of the arguments were still based on the traditional concepts that classified the diviners or mantic arts that they transmitted as "small ways" or deprecated them as "absurd, deceitful, fake, strange" theories. However, with their spread and development in the Northern and Southern Song dynasties, many literati started to realize that Confucianism also faced challenges and threats from the "small ways" of mantic arts, in addition to Buddhism and Daoism. Some literati vigorously criticized and rejected mantic arts in order to uphold the basic Confucian ideology and view of fate. Others recognized them, but also tried to uphold and promote the Confucian view of fate in their gift writings. Other literati further disclosed that mantic arts were not simply skills, but also significant for an in-depth exploration and understanding, and so worthy of the engagement of literati. When the "small ways" gradually broke free from the traditional framework, as indicated by the phrase "a superior man does not do it" (*junzi bu wei* 君子不為), the interaction between the literati and mantic arts gradually became more reasonable, and the long-accepted custom of using "the small ways" and "the orthodox way" (*zhengdao* 正道) to classify and evaluate knowledge and practices was revised. This gradual revision was key in transforming and elevating the social status and social image of mantic arts and their practitioners.

Abbreviations

SKQS Jingyin wenyuange siku quanshu 景印文淵閣四庫全書 [Photofacsimile reprint of the Wenyuange edition of *the Complete Library in Four Treasuries*]. 1500 vols. Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu yinshuguan, 1983.

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Popular Religion and Prognostication

Philip Clart

1 Introduction

It is commonplace to say that all human beings seek assurance about their future; such supposed anthropological universals, if they can be proven, are interesting facts in themselves, of course; however, they are not the end, but only the beginning of the study of human cultures. Starting out from the assumption that the incest taboo was universal, Claude Lévi-Strauss launched into a wide-ranging cross-cultural investigation of kinship systems to investigate the different ways the incest taboo is integrated in them, thus arriving at crucial insights concerning group exogamy as the very foundation of society.¹ Similarly, the presence of techniques of prognostication in all (most?) human cultures as such does not yet tell us much about any of these cultures. If culture is indeed the human endeavour to create a meaningful world to live in,² it is only to be expected that this effort extends not only to the present and past, but also the future. For the student of human cultures, however, from such an a priori, but arguably well-founded anthropological assumption arise much more interesting questions concerning the forms and functions of prognostication techniques in cultures past and present. Such an investigation will not just allow us to contemplate the vast variety of cultural arrangements – a joy in itself, to be sure – but promises to point us towards key variables in cultural notions and social structures, which will eventually enrich our fundamental understanding of human culture and society. This chapter will seek to illustrate this potential by not just listing and describing prognostication techniques prevalent in Chinese popular religion, but also by paying close attention to the ways in which such techniques contribute to the “world-making” of Chinese culture(s), here in particular in that cultural sphere conventionally designated as “popular religion.”

¹ Lévi-Strauss, *Les structures élémentaires*.

² Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*.

2 Chinese Popular Religion

Having written quite a bit about both empirical and conceptual aspects of “Chinese popular religion,” I shall draw on my previous work in delineating this chapter’s field of enquiry.³ This delineation will focus on the two adjectives, “Chinese” and “popular,” as this is not the place to enter the long-standing (and likely never-ending) debate about definitions of “religion.”

The first adjective is the easier one: “Chinese” does not imply the existence of a homogenous and unitary culture, but serves as an umbrella term for a wide variety of cultural formations in- and outside of China proper. What justifies their subsumption under the moniker “Chinese” is their use of Chinese as the spoken and/or written language of their transmission, “Chinese” meaning here the large family of diverse dialects (topolects) gathered together with the official language of “Mandarin” (*Putonghua* 普通話, *Huayu* 華語).

The second adjective, “popular,” is a little trickier, especially in conjunction with the noun, “religion.” While the problematic labels “Confucian,” “Daoist,” and “Buddhist” at least have more or less clearly identifiable counterparts in traditional Chinese usage, the term “popular religion” smacks of Orientalist imposition as it does not correspond to any immediately apparent pre-modern Chinese conceptual construct. Modern Chinese usage does have a variety of corresponding terms, most of which were imported as translations of Western terminology via Japan since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet none of these terms provides a perfect match for the notion of “popular religion” as it is employed by Western students of Chinese religious life. This disconnect is one of the reasons why the very notion of “popular religion” has been and still is hotly debated among specialists, with various alternatives being proposed, such as folk religion, common religion, or local religion. They need to be mentioned merely to alert the reader to the fact that “popular religion” is primarily a heuristic concept and not an unambiguous empirical phenomenon. Heuristically, it allows the researcher to group together data that indicate systemic cohesion without being clearly identifiable with an (emically or etically named) cultural subsystem. Its purpose is not to serve as a residual category for the religious odds and ends that do not fit under the heading of one of the “great traditions,” but to direct attention to the “lived religion” of Chinese people in different time periods and different regions of the Chinese cultural sphere. It is the religion of people of all classes beyond the institutional contexts immediately controlled and run by professional clergy

3 See, for example, Clart, “Chinese Popular Religion,” and “The Concept of ‘Popular Religion.’”

or the central state authorities, yet these contexts may still play various roles in the sphere of popular religion. The heuristic key of “popular religion” opens up vistas of a vast religious landscape that includes diverse phenomena such as the ancestral cult at house altars and lineage halls, the worship of tutelary deities at roadside shrines and village temples, the life-cycle rituals of families, the seasonal festivals of communities, and the beliefs and practices of numerous so-called “popular sects,” i.e., lay-based religious movements with their own scriptures, traditions, and leadership, separate from the major religious traditions. Buddhism and Daoism as well as the state always featured in this “lived religion” in some fashion or other: For example, in many areas of China, the state tried to prohibit cults to certain deities while promoting those of others; religious specialists affiliated with one of the “Three Teachings” played important roles in familial death rituals; Buddhist monks or Daoist priests often served as hired care-takers in local temples. Yet in such instances, religious specialists usually served specific roles within popular religion without controlling it or significantly changing its underlying logic; state influence, too, usually did not succeed in completely transforming local cults according to some government-decreed standard of ritual practice and ethical value.

The present chapter will, therefore, consider the forms and functions of prognosticative techniques within the cultural sphere of “Chinese popular religion” as defined above. Popular religion being an open heuristic category rather than a clearly delineated and enclosed cultural subsystem, there will inevitably exist numerous areas of overlap, mutual influence, and interaction with the subject matter of other chapters in this *Handbook*. So as to avoid unnecessary duplication, this chapter will focus on common prognostication techniques employed in present-day popular religion, with only limited historical depth.

3 Types of Prognosticative Techniques

In the narrow sense, prognostication is that subtype of divination directed towards future events and outcomes, but it is not easy – and in the context of popular religion arguably not meaningful – to distinguish it too strictly from other forms of divination, since the same techniques can be used to diagnose present situations and predict future outcomes. Indeed, both aspects are frequently closely intertwined. Divination blocks (see below) can be used to ask about causes of existing distress, methods to resolve it, and the future outcome of the application of such methods. Divination slips can predict future success or obstacles, or provide diagnoses and therapies for already existing diseases. A spirit-medium can provide insights into events past, present, and future.

Thus, prognostication is one mode of divination possible for the various techniques and their practitioners to be introduced in this chapter. In Chinese history, the prognosticative mode was the politically most sensitive, especially when it involved predictions of dynastic change; for this reason, the legal codes of the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing dynasties (1644–1911) formally prohibited many of the practices to be described here.⁴

Divination can be loosely defined as a practice of producing knowledge either based on divine or spiritual agency, or on a more or less esoteric system of reference available only to trained specialists.⁵ The latter aspect could, of course, be understood to also include, for example, modern bio-medicine which is a closed, “esoteric” system of knowledge to the lay patient. And indeed, in popular religious settings practitioners of academic medicine are often seen as just one possible source of knowledge concerning health and healing, competing with other sources such as spirit-mediums or medical divination slips.⁶ As divination techniques involving expert knowledge, such as geomancy and astrology, are addressed in more detail elsewhere in this volume,⁷ I will provide a brief overview of such options within popular religion, but give more attention to forms of divination involving spiritual agency.

4 Cosmos and Spirits in Popular Religion

In the classical period a correlative cosmology took shape that remains influential to the present day. Yin and yang, the Five Phases, the Eight Trigrams and 64 Hexagrams of the *Book of Changes*, the Ten Celestial Stems and Twelve Earthly Branches are key elements of a worldview based on the notion of an ordered cosmos whose laws and structures are intelligible and to some extent amenable to being employed for human purposes. Traditional sciences such as medicine, astronomy/astrology, agriculture, calendrics, alchemy, and various mantic arts are based on this correlative cosmology that continues to shape the basic worldview of Chinese popular religion. It is ubiquitously present in this cultural sphere in the shape of the almanac, a handbook that includes a calendar of the current lunar year, indicates the constellations of cosmic forces

4 See, for example, Jiang, *The Mandate of Heaven*, 91–99.

5 Cf. Raymond Bloch's distinction of “divination inspirée” and “divination par les signes” in Greco-Roman antiquity, and Philip M. Peek's differentiation between “inspirational (possession) and non-inspirational divination” in African contexts. Bloch, *La divination*, 13; Peek, “Introduction,” 12.

6 Kleinman, *Patients and Healers*.

7 See the contributions by Marc Kalinowski and Richard Smith in this volume.

for each day of that year, and provides practical advice on the consequences of these constellations in terms of auspicious and inauspicious activities. Few temples and traditionally-minded homes go without this crucial cosmological reference source.⁸

Of the mantic arts mentioned, geomancy shall here exemplify the role and importance of correlative cosmology within popular religion. Also called *fengshui* 風水 (wind-and-water), geomancy analyzes the streams of cosmic forces criss-crossing space so as to locate human dwellings (both for the living and for the dead) in such a way that they profit from these force constellations rather than be harmed by them. This traditional science has diversified into several different schools with different methods and theories, but basic notions are shared and a consensus exists on the fundamental features of desirable locations. Thus, a geomantically favourable location for a tomb should face south (ideally towards a water current) and be protected towards the north by an elevation, with ridges flanking the tomb site on its eastern and western sides. Such a location concentrates positive energies in the tomb, benefiting both the deceased and his or her descendants. Innumerable stories tell of riches, progeny, and success in the civil examinations owed to the superior qualities of the ancestors' tombs; conversely, setbacks and streaks of misfortune may be corrected by resituating the dwellings of both living and dead family members, though this might also become a source of conflict among family members as specific sites may have differential effects on individuals and branches within the family. Similarly, geomancy furnishes a language of resistance and competition in conflicts between local communities about resource allocation or between local communities and state agencies, for example, when infrastructure projects such as railway lines, roads, bridges, or canals are deemed to disturb the geomantic properties of the community's territory.⁹ Sometimes criticized by Confucians for its underlying profit motive, the basic effectiveness of geomancy was rarely questioned in traditional China.¹⁰ In Imperial China, professional practitioners of geomancy were often failed examination candidates; to the present day, the geomancer is often endowed with an aura of traditional erudition and is hired as a technical expert rather than a religious specialist.

8 Morgan, *Le Tableau du 'Boeuf du Printemps'*; Smith, *Fortune-Tellers and Philosophers*, 74–91; Palmer, *T'ung Shu*.

9 On social and political uses of geomancy, see Freedman, "Geomancy"; Smith, *Fortune-Tellers and Philosophers*, chapter 4; Li, "Chinese Geomancy and Ancestor Worship," 329–38.

10 Ebrey, "Sung Neo-Confucian Views on Geomancy"; Liao, "Exploring Weal and Woe."

However, this cosmos operating by the interplay of abstract forces is also populated by personal beings who interact with humans and influence their existence. In popular religion, there are three major types of such beings: gods, ghosts, and ancestors. Most of these are not only imagined and depicted anthropomorphically, but are in fact human in origin. This is most easily understood in the case of ancestors, who in life were human beings and now exist as spirits honoured and cared for by their living descendants. Ghosts are spirits of the dead as well, except that they have no descendants who would look after them; hence they roam around unattached to a kin group and may create all kinds of troubles and misfortunes. Gods are powerful spirits representing public order and values and are imagined to be organized into a celestial bureaucracy headed by the Jade Emperor. Many gods were once human, but ascended to divine status after their deaths because of their extraordinary merits or powerful reputation. One of the most common deities of popular religion, the red-faced Guangong 關公 (Lord Guan), whose shrines are found in many Chinese restaurants across the world, was in his life-time the famous general Guan Yu 關羽 (?–219 CE), whose martial exploits were immortalized in the famous novel *Sanguozhi yanyi* 三國志演義 (The romance of the Three Kingdoms).¹¹ Just as humans can after death join the ranks of the gods, ghosts, or ancestors, so is it possible for spirits to move from one category into another. Ancestors become ghosts when their line of descendants dies out or ceases to worship its ancestors. Ghosts may become ancestors by posthumously adopting descendants who will perform sacrifices to them. Ghosts may rise into the ranks of the gods when they prove themselves to be powerful and willing to use their powers for the benefit of humans.¹² The most widely worshipped deity in Taiwan (and in many, mostly coastal areas of mainland China) is Mazu 媽祖, also known by her title Tianhou 天后 (Empress of Heaven). She was the daughter of a fisherman in the southeastern province of Fujian, who died unmarried (and therefore without descendants), but whose spirit soon acquired the reputation of protecting fishermen and other seafarers against the dangers of the oceans. She thus attracted worshippers who spread her stories and increased her reputation for efficacy (*ling* 靈), i.e., her willingness and ability to fulfil requests put to her in prayers. If a deity loses its *ling*, the number of worshippers will dwindle and its cult will eventually vanish. Thus there exists a close reciprocal relationship between spirits and humans, each side depending in some way on the other.¹³

11 On Guan Yu's deification, see ter Haar, *Guan Yu*.

12 Harrell, "When a Ghost Becomes a God."

13 Sangren, *History and Magical Power*.

Gods, ghosts, and ancestors are distinguished ritually by the different kinds of sacrifices offered them and the different locations at which these sacrifices are performed. Thus, in many areas of Taiwan gods receive odd (= *yang* 陽) numbers of incense sticks, while ancestors receive even (= *yin* 陰) numbers; gods are offered gold "spirit money," while ghosts and ancestors are given silver money. Food offerings for gods are uncooked and uncut, while those for ghosts are cooked, but uncut, and those for ancestors are cooked and cut.¹⁴ Thus, ritual serves as a code by means of which categorical distinctions are expressed. The code may be used creatively to shift the recipients from one category to another. This happens, for example, when a ghostly entity acquires more and more divine characteristics and begins to receive offerings proper to gods from some worshippers, while others may still be continuing to treat it ritually as a ghost.¹⁵

Their tripartite categorization parallels three social worlds relevant to ordinary Chinese past and present: family and kinship (ancestors), state and public order (gods), and the forces of disorder and anti-structure (ghosts). The spirit world as Durkheimian mirror of social realities, however, is not static, but changes with the shifting social experiences of humans. An important study has shown, for example, that the significance of ghosts has shifted in northern Taiwan from threatening entities akin to bandits and marauders within the unsettled socio-political conditions of the nineteenth century to pitiful beggars and outsiders in the largely stable and prosperous Taiwanese society of the late twentieth century. This shift is traceable in the changing style and intensity of rituals performed annually for the propitiation of hungry ghosts.¹⁶ Furthermore, the bureaucratic metaphor does not completely explain the complexity and flexibility of the popular pantheon. While many gods are viewed and addressed as celestial functionaries and are organized in a bureaucratic hierarchy from the lowly local earth god over the city god all the way up to the Jade Emperor, other deities stand outside these official structures of power. The just-mentioned goddess Mazu is a case in question, as are all female deities who are by their gender excluded from participation in the patriarchal imperial bureaucracy and wield their powers through unofficial, but by no means less efficacious channels.¹⁷ Other deities are unconventional mavericks whose assistance is often sought by marginal (and sometimes shady)

14 Feuchtwang, "Domestic and Communal Worship."

15 Weller, *Resistance, Chaos and Control*.

16 Weller, *Unities and Diversities*.

17 Sangren, "Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols."

individuals and groups.¹⁸ Thus the interrelationship of religious and social realities is complex and varies over time.

In an orderly and intelligible cosmos there can be no omnipotent deity. Instead, the role and function of both humans and spirits is that of actors on a cosmic stage. The stage and the play set limits on their actions, but they have different degrees of freedom to improvise and develop their parts. The resultant interactions of the players create much of the drama that is Chinese popular religion.

5 Divination as Communication

Divination is a key form of interaction between humans and the spirit world as it was outlined above. It seeks to obtain specific information from spiritual interlocutors by means of various methods such as the throwing of divination blocks, drawing of lots, and spirit possession. These can be separated functionally from other forms of communication (such as prayer and sacrifice), but practically the latter are indispensable as they serve to establish the relationship between spirit and supplicant within which divination becomes possible. Thus, for example, the throwing of divination blocks is framed by prayers of supplication and thanks, vows, as well by as sacrificial acts (typically the burning of incense). The divination itself is thus just a stage in a more complex communicative process that establishes social relations. As we will see below, it is very important to keep the social dimensions of divinatory practices in mind and not to commit to an overly narrow perspective on technical aspects alone.

Nevertheless, it is with the techniques more narrowly circumscribed that we shall begin. The earliest attempt at a classification of divination techniques in Chinese (or rather Taiwanese) popular religion was provided by anthropologist Emily Martin Ahern in her book *Chinese Ritual and Politics*.¹⁹ Similar to the approach taken above of distinguishing two basic types of divination, Ahern separates

divinatory acts that involve interpersonal transactions from those that involve causal or other connections. One set of divinatory methods should be described as interpersonal in the sense that they are explicitly understood as efforts to communicate with the gods. Another set

¹⁸ Shahar and Weller, *Unruly Gods*.

¹⁹ Ahern, *Chinese Ritual and Politics*.

of methods do not involve forms of communication between sentient beings as a central feature: instead they are concerned with understanding forces and processes that operate in the world.²⁰

While in my view the interpersonal aspects of, say, geomantic consultations *in practice* should not be underestimated, it is certainly correct to emphasize the intrinsically interpersonal nature of techniques such as divination blocks, lots, and spirit-mediumship. These latter types are arranged by Ahern on a continuum of more or less “restricted codes,” depending on the quality of the conversation possible. The most restricted code is provided by divination blocks, two crescent-shaped wood blocks, flat below and curved above, whose combinations as they are dropped on the ground provide only three possible answers by spirits to the questions posed by human interlocutors: affirmative (flat/curved), negative (curved/curved), and indeterminate (flat/flat). With this limited range of answers, any elaboration of the “conversation” depends on the human interlocutor’s continuous reframing of his or her questions, a process which has been shown to involve an acute awareness of statistical probabilities in the results to be expected from the fall of the divination blocks.²¹ Nevertheless, this is the most common method for divinatory communication with spirits of all kinds and is used for many purposes, ranging from the resolution of individual life problems (e.g., prediction of examination success) over family matters (e.g., obtaining the ancestors’ permission in major decisions such as weddings and funerals) to community matters (such as the appointment of an “incense-burner master,” *luzhu* 爐主, as the person responsible for organizing a religious festival, or determining a deity’s will in appointing a new spirit-medium). As we can see from these examples, prognostication in the narrow sense is only a part of the divinatory communication carried on by means of the divination blocks. In fact, this points to a way that one might elaborate Ahern’s model further. While she is certainly correct in pointing out the highly restricted nature of the code used for the spirits’ answers, the divination blocks in no way restrict the questions that can be asked by the supplicant. Any and all questions can be asked and answers obtained, even while the latter are limited to three options.

20 Ahern, *Chinese Ritual and Politics*, 45. Compare this to Stéphanie Homola’s similar differentiation of “inductive/intuitive” and “deductive” forms of divination, the former involving “communication with a non-human entity,” the latter not; Homola, “Judging Destiny,” 40; Homola, “Pursue Good Fortune,” 124–25.

21 Ahern, *Chinese Ritual and Politics*, 45–47; Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors*, 61–64.

The next major type of divination, the drawing of lots (*chouqian* 抽籤), represents a code that is simultaneously more open and more restricted. It is more open in that more complex answers can be generated; at the same time, the applicability of the divinatory texts is frequently limited by means of a framing text to a fixed set of thematic fields, such as health, career, examinations, etc. The technique requires the drawing of a numbered lot, generally from a cylindrical container placed on a temple's altar; the number corresponds to a poem printed on a slip of paper. The poem needs to be interpreted by the supplicant or by a temple caretaker charged with this task. Often such divination slips contain aids to interpretation by providing a general indication of the degree of auspiciousness or inauspiciousness and/or providing brief exegeses in relation to particular subject matters (such as the health, career, etc. mentioned above). Lots and their corresponding divination slips come most frequently in sets of sixty or a hundred, and are provided for use mostly in popular religious and Daoist temples devoted to the gods who are seen as the providers (and sometimes authors) of these metrical prognostications; by contrast, the divination blocks previously treated can be encountered and employed in a greater variety of settings, including family altars, ancestral temples, and ghost shrines.²² *Chouqian* is usually employed in the resolution of individual or household concerns; different from the divination blocks, this method is rarely (if ever) employed in larger community contexts. This is likely due to that fact that public divination is generally intended to reach a quick and clear-cut decision in potentially contentious issues of public debate (such as the appointment of a *luzhu*, the rebuilding of a temple, the holding of a *jiao* 醮 ritual, etc.). While divination by the throwing of blocks yields simple up or down votes, the poems resulting from *qian* divination have several possible readings, which may serve to increase rather than end public debate about the issue at hand.

The third type of divination discussed by Ahern is communication with/through a possessed medium. This type provides the least restricted code for both questions and answers, though the specific degree of openness again depends on the specific type of mediumship employed. As this is a rather wide and complex field of inquiry, I shall treat it in the following separate section.

22 On this system of divination see Banck, *Das chinesische Tempelorakel*; Banck, *Das chinesische Tempelorakel*, Vol. 2, *Übersetzungen und Analysen*; Lin, *Qianzhan yu Zhongguo shehui wenhua*. A specialized form of this divination method are sets of divination slips devoted to the provision of medical prescriptions, so-called *yaoqian* 藥籤 (medical oracle slips). See Yoshimoto, *Taiwan simiao yaoqian yanjiu*.

6 Spirit-Mediumship and Divination

How does a person become a spirit-medium? For the Chinese cultural sphere,²³ the answer most commonly reported is: a medium is chosen by the gods, mostly against his or her own will. Field researchers again and again stress the supposedly involuntary character of the process: prospective mediums suffer seizures, hallucinations, or strange ailments that are interpreted as a deity's call to surrender to it. Often they struggle against the god, refusing to lend their body to the divine spirit. Many, but by no means all, candidates ultimately succumb and restructure their lives to accommodate the possession experiences. Thereby they become important communication channels with the realm of the gods for their local community. A brief look at some ethnographical accounts of spirit-mediums (*tâng-ki* 童乩) in Hokkien dialect areas will suffice to sketch this standard view of Chinese mediumism. Writing about late nineteenth-century Amoy (Xiamen 廈門), Jan Jakob Maria de Groot states:

It is generally asserted, that the capacity to be an animated medium for gods and spirits is no acquisition, but a gift which manifests itself spontaneously. It happens indeed, especially at religious festivals, celebrated in temples with great concourse of people, that a young man suddenly begins to hop, dance and waddle with wild or drowzy looks, and nervous gestures of arms and hands. Bystanders grasp his arms and sustain him, knowing that, while in this condition, his fall to the ground may cause sudden death. All onlookers at once realize the fact that one of the gods whose images stand in the temple, or some other spirit, has "seized the youth," *liáh tâng*, and the parish will henceforth rejoice in the possession of one more medium for its intercourse with the divine world.²⁴

David Jordan, writing about the village of "Bao-an" in 1960s southern Taiwan, confirms the involuntary character of the medium's selection and reinforces this image by referring to the prospective medium's active resistance to the call:

23 By Chinese cultural sphere I mean all those populations that, in spite of all their regional variations, are culturally part of Chinese civilization. This includes the Han populations of the People's Republic of China, Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and overseas Chinese communities throughout the world.

24 de Groot, *The Soul and Ancestral Worship*, 1270.

The job is not one that people enjoy, or so it is claimed. Nearly all *tâng-ki* maintain that they tried every possible inducement to persuade the posessing god to select someone else before they finally surrendered before the inevitable.²⁵

Jordan goes on to relate the story of the village medium Guo Tian-huah who resisted the advances of the deity for several years before finally becoming its medium.²⁶ This pattern of resistance is indeed a common element in the life stories of many mediums. The first case described in Timothy Lane's fascinating psychological study of Taiwanese mediums replicates this pattern. The "reluctant medium" Chen Ling-mei resisted for about two years before becoming a speaking medium (*qiaoshou* 覈手) in a sectarian group (Yiguan Dao 一貫道).²⁷ In fact, the theme of resistance is so widespread that it is sometimes seen as a routinized stock feature of a medium's career, serving to establish the sincerity of the medium in the eyes of the community.²⁸

In folk theory, involuntary possession is usually explained as being due to certain defects in the medium's "eight characters" (*bazi* 八字), which predetermine him or her to a short life span. The defectiveness of his or her destiny simultaneously explains the medium's susceptibility to trance behaviour and indicates that the gods' sometimes violent advances are actually motivated by compassion, as mediums can lengthen their life-span by lending their body to a deity.²⁹

The prospective medium's resistance is commonly explained by reference to the low prestige enjoyed by the spirit-medium. As with so many elements in our understanding of Chinese religions, this too goes back to de Groot's monumental *Religious System of China*:

Most of these dancing dervishes come from the lower classes. People of good standing seldom debase themselves to things which [...] were spoken of in terms of contempt by the holy I-yin thirty-five centuries ago, however frequently they may have recourse to them for revelation of unknown things.³⁰

25 Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors*, 71.

26 Ibid., 71–72.

27 Lane, "The Left Hand of God," 52–53.

28 See, for example, Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors*, 73; Xiaolingyi, *Tongji zhuotou zhi yanjiu*, 31.

29 This folk theory is widely reported in the secondary literature, starting with de Groot, *The Soul and Ancestral Worship*, 1269. It has been analyzed in the greatest detail by Brigitte Baptandier; see Berthier, "Enfant de divination"; Baptandier, "Façonner la divinité en soi."

30 de Groot, *The Soul and Ancestral Worship*, 1270.

Echoing in de Groot's words are the attitudes of the traditional Chinese elite, who have looked down upon the practitioners of what de Groot calls "Wu-ism" ever since the firm establishment of a Confucian orthodoxy in the Han dynasty.³¹ Were these attitudes shared by the "lower classes" from which the mediums were recruited? Here the consensus of the more recent ethnographic literature seems to be that the medium may play an enormously important and prestigious role in community affairs, but can wield his or her power only while in trance. In other words, respect is accorded to the possessing deity, not to the possessed individual, who out of trance typically occupies no particularly exalted position.³²

This pattern of involuntary mediumship dominates the image of Chinese spirit-mediumship among the Western academic community. However, alongside the highly visible and dramatic possession performance of the *tâng-ki* there exists a different form of spirit-mediumship, more subdued in style and more highly regarded by the traditional elite: spirit-writing. Here a medium communicates a deity's statements not by spoken words but in writing, often by means of a "planchette," a term borrowed from Western spiritualism for the Y-shaped wooden implement used to trace characters on a sand-covered surface. A scribe copies the characters onto paper and the resulting texts are regarded as sacred writ and are often printed for either group-internal or general distribution. Such "literate" mediumship carried considerable prestige and was employed by many groups and classes.³³ A significant portion of scriptures in the *Daoist Canon* were revealed in spirit-writing séances, while many literati of the late Imperial period patronized spirit-writing groups where they could communicate and exchange poetry with the spirits of great thinkers and poets of the past. Spirit-writing serves to the present day as an important mode of communication between humans and gods, and as a source of scriptural revelation in popular religion.³⁴ Elsewhere I have argued that the higher prestige accruing to spirit-writing is linked to its voluntary, "cultivational" nature, i.e., to an understanding of mediumship as a personal spiritual achievement rather than an affliction.³⁵ Against this background, it becomes understandable that spirit-writing was widely used in late Imperial and modern China to produce lengthy texts on moral admonishment and spiritual cultivation.

31 See de Groot, *The Soul and Ancestral Worship*, 1187–1242, for a history of Confucian-"Wu-ist" relations. For a more recent assessment, see Sutton, "From Credulity to Scorn."

32 See, for example, Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors*, 73, 84–86; Sutton, "Ritual Trance and Social Order."

33 Clart, "Moral Mediums."

34 Jordan and Overmyer, *The Flying Phoenix*.

35 Clart, "Moral Mediums."

Large parts of the Qing dynasty collection *Daozang jiyao* 道藏輯要 (Essentials of the Daoist Canon) were produced by means of spirit-writing, especially by literati-patronized cult groups focusing on the deity Lüzu 呂祖 (Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓, Fuyou Dijun 孚佑帝君).³⁶ This text production continues to the present day outside of the Chinese mainland, such as in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and among overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia. These texts could be regarded as divinations in that they convey divine knowledge to humans, and some are prognosticative, offering prophecies concerning future calamities. However, they typically lack the dialogic nature of the other methods described above, being cast as either sacred scriptures (*jing* 經) or various kinds of treatises and essays to instruct the cult's followers (and often society at large) in moral and spiritual practice. This is often couched in eschatological language concerning the moral degeneration of society; the prophesied divine punishment for humanity's depravity can only be avoided by sedulously following the revealed text's teachings. Thus, these spirit-written texts are better understood as *revelations* that prescribe remedies for the ills of the world, and in the process help to meld their believers into moral communities of practitioners.

I propose to limit the use of "divination" in this context to usages of the planchette in the kind of dialogic settings pointed at earlier, i.e., for the resolution of specific issues brought to the gods' attention by individuals or groups. Here spirit-writing can fulfil functions in a fairly open code similar to that of the speaking medium, though in practice communication tends to be more restricted owing to limitations on both the divine and the human side. In many modern cult groups, the questioner typically submits his or her queries in writing and receives an answer in the same format. Follow-up questioning is rare, and often the supplicant may not even be present in person. Even where the supplicant is present and poses his or her questions orally, the deity's replies tend to be succinct owing to the somewhat laborious process of tracing and copying the characters.³⁷ This brevity is often further enhanced by the use of literary Chinese as the preferred idiom of divine communication. However, keeping these practical limiting factors in mind, spirit-writing can in principle be used for any kind of communication. And in fact, while the historical record has preserved mostly longer revelatory texts and allows us only occasional

36 See the ongoing collaborative *Daozang jiyao* 道藏輯要 project at Kyoto University and the Chinese University of Hong Kong, http://www.daozangjiyao.org/DZJY_E/Project.html (last accessed on June 16, 2017). Lai, *Daozang jiyao, tiyao*.

37 Though this is circumvented in many modern spirit-writing cults by forgoing use of the planchette for more informal purposes such as individual divination. Nowadays, the medium in such cases often writes out the deity's replies directly with pen on paper, thus greatly speeding up the process.

glimpses of more informal divinatory uses of the technique, modern ethnographic evidence shows that such use of the planchette is very common. Most spirit-writing cults that conduct formal text-writing séances also provide space for divinatory sessions devoted to individual queries submitted. Such sessions are often called *jishi* 濟世 (relieving the world) as opposed to the text production (*zhushu* 著書) of the formal séances. As a technique, spirit-writing is also widely used outside of spirit-writing cults proper; in Taiwan, one will often find mediums at local temples employing spirit-writing in their own consulting sessions. Both inside and outside of spirit-writing cults, the planchette may also be used to write out charms (*fu* 符) and prescriptions for the supplicant's use.³⁸ One variant, but in the popular context very widespread, form of spirit-writing is the use of a "divining chair" (*jiaozi* 轎仔, Hokkien *kiō-á*), a small wooden chair handled by two persons; once the chair (or one or both of its handlers – interpretations differ)³⁹ becomes possessed, it starts tracing out characters on a tabletop (not in sand). This kind of writing is hard to decipher and its construction often owes more to the ingenuity of the interpreter (*zhuotou* 桌頭) than to the actions of the chair itself.

7 Social Functions of Divination

Above I followed the main drift of existing scholarship on divination in Chinese popular religion in focusing on the communicative functions and properties of divinatory techniques. This approach helps to profile the nature of communication, but it only catches a partial picture in that it neglects the social context in which divination takes place. This is immediately apparent in the "divining chair" séances, which may be devoted to either communal, household, or individual concerns, but even household and individual matters are negotiated in public divination sessions involving other members of the community, who may freely join in the discussion of the issue at hand. A recent study of religious specialists in northern Shaanxi 陝西 province, in the fabled revolutionary base area of Yan'an 延安, shows that divination sessions performed by spirit-mediums are public events that create

38 In such cases, the medium either uses a writing brush directly or by having it attached to the tip of the planchette.

39 Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors*, 64–67; Ahern, *Chinese Ritual and Politics*, 49–50.

a new kind of social space where people mingle together and share their experiences of inauspiciousness and health problems regardless of social status or whether they are rural or urban, haves or have-nots.⁴⁰

The dramatic qualities of spirit possession thus provide a stage on which private and public concerns are merged and a sense of community is created. This public quality adheres even to fortune-telling by specialists who do not undergo spirit possession. Especially in rural settings individual fortune-telling is often a public event that involves neighbours, friends, and onlookers who all feel free to pitch into the discussion.⁴¹ Such (semi-)public divination sessions thus serve psychological functions by allowing individuals to verbalize their problems and obtain understanding and support; at the same time, they serve important social functions by bringing conflicts out into the open and, ideally, resolving them in a quasi-public debate. The medium as a spokesperson of the gods in particular is often able to “mediate” in more than one sense of the word, serving as arbiter of social conflict, instrument of social control, and focal point of community formation. In Taiwan, spirit-mediums perform the last-named function also for rural migrants in the city where they reconstitute the close bonds of village life in voluntary associations formed around a spirit-medium.⁴² Thus, the cultural meanings of divination do not reside merely in the techniques themselves, but in their social context and in the uses to which they are put. This social dimension is crucial in the study of any practice in Chinese popular religion, including the seemingly most technical forms of divination.

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40 Wu, *Reinventing Chinese Tradition*, 132.

41 Cf., for example, Ian Johnson’s description of fortune-telling in rural Shanxi 山西 province in his *The Souls of China*, 46–48.

42 See Wei-Ping Lin’s case study: *Materializing Magic Power*, chapters 4 and 5.

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Daoism and Divination

Fabrizio Pregadio

The “Procedures Concerning the Administration of Daoist Monasteries and Temples,” first formulated by the China Taoist Association (Zhongguo Daojiao xiehui 中國道教協會) in 1988 and officially issued in 1992, states in one of its sections:

Within monasteries and temples it is forbidden to practice feudal superstitious activities, including performing trance dances, exorcism, physiognomy, “fate calculation” (*suanming*), glyphomancy (*cezi*, divination through the analysis of written characters), divination by means of trigrams and hexagrams, topomancy (*fengshui*), and spirit-writing (*fuji*), which upset public security, defraud people, and harm the population’s physical and mental health.¹

宮觀內不得搞跳神、趕鬼、看相、算命、測字、卜卦、看風水、扶乩等擾亂社會治安和騙人詐才、危害人民身心健康的封建迷信活動。

In the current statute, issued in 2010 and modified in 2015, this rule is phrased differently, but the wording is still broad enough to include the mantic arts.² Both versions would suggest that Daoism – under the control of the Chinese government and in agreement with it – not only prohibits the use of divination within its main institutions, but also dissociates itself from the mantic arts as a whole. Yet, while this is in several cases true, we also know that Daoism and

1 “Zhongguo Daojiao xiehui guanyu Daojiao gongguan banfa 中国道教协会关于道教宫观管理办法.” This document was published in the journal of the China Taoist Association, *Zhongguo Daojiao* 中國道教 1992.4.

2 The current statute does not mention specific divination techniques and does not use the word “superstition” (*mixin* 迷信). Emphasis instead is placed on “illegal and illicit activities” (*weifa luanji huodong* 違法亂紀活動), effectively delegating the whole matter to the PRC laws and regulations (both national and local) on this subject. As of this writing, the current statute is published under the title “Daojiao gongguan banfa 道教宮觀管理辦法” in the website of the Chinese Taoist Association (www.taois.org.cn), in the section “Rules and Regulations for the Chinese Daoist World” (“Zhongguo Daojiaojie guizhang zhidu 中國道教界規章制度”). I am grateful to several colleagues who have helped me to identify these sources.

various forms of divination have been in a close, though often controversial, relationship for almost two millennia.

This relationship has been noticed and discussed by several scholars. As Mark Csikszentmihalyi remarks, “the Daoist religion in both its worldview and practices derives to a large extent from the cosmology and mantic practices of the Han dynasty.”³ The historical and intellectual relation between the techniques of the Han-dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) *fangshi* 方士, or “masters of the methods,” and some later Daoist practices has also been repeatedly pointed out. With regard to the works cited in relevant sections of the bibliographic chapters of the *Hanshu* 漢書 (History of the Han Dynasty), Csikszentmihalyi continues:

Many of the practices outlined in the texts also appear in later Daoist collections. This is true of two areas in particular: the complex of medical and immortality techniques and the techniques for determining auspiciousness that involve spirits and demons.... The Han interest in evaluating the best time or day for a given activity is at the center of the “Numerical Algorithms and Techniques” [*shushu* 數術] category, and some of these techniques also overlap with those found in later Daoist texts. The twelve spirits of the cosmic board [*shi* 式] are connected with the calendar in several texts in the Daoist Canon.⁴

With the class of practitioners designed as *fangshi* – a general definition of experts in various techniques, from divination and astronomy to medicine and “immortality practices” – we are indeed close to what Daoism would become in later times: rather than the “shaman” (with his or her ecstasies and trances), the diviner (who often fashions a “rational” world relying on images and emblems with precise meanings and functions) may be seen as the predecessor of the Daoist master and the Daoist priest – although, as we shall see, this is precisely one of the reasons of the Daoist conflict with divination.⁵ Similarly, Isabelle Robinet noticed with regard to the Daoist ritual space that “the schematic structure of this world is exactly the same as that found in the divination tablets [*shi* 式] of the Han ... [Daoist] ritual can thus be seen as drawing directly from the calendrical computations and speculations of the

3 Csikszentmihalyi, “Han Cosmology and Mantic Practices,” 53.

4 Ibid., 65. On the divination works cited in the *Hanshu*, see the article by Marc Kalinowski in the present volume. See also Kalinowski, “Technical Traditions in Ancient China and *Shushu* Culture in Chinese Religion,” and Raphals, “Divination in the *Han Shu* Bibliographic Treatise.”

5 For remarks on the figures of shaman, the diviner, and the Daoist priest, see Lagerwey, “Écriture et corps divin,” 282–83.

Han.”⁶ As Anna Seidel demonstrated in a masterful work, the roots of Daoism in the Han-dynasty “weft texts” (*weishu* 緯書, or “apocrypha”) are another component showing that Daoism was ready to integrate several forms of divination and prognostication into its practices.⁷

This integration did indeed occur, and not only in domains proximate to religious cults and ritual practices. To give a few examples, Yan Zun 嚴遵 (first century BCE), one of the earliest known commentators of the *Laozi* 老子, was a professional diviner;⁸ and more than one millennium later, the same is true of Hao Datong 郝大通 (1140–1213), an early master of the Quanzhen 全真 (Complete Reality) branch of Daoism.⁹ The gift of predicting the future is one of the powers of Daoist immortals,¹⁰ and even Laojun 老君 (Lord Lao, Laozi in his divine aspect) is said, in the earliest source that concerns him, to “observe the heavens and make prophecies” (*guantian zuochen* 觀天作讖).¹¹ Yet, as we shall see, Daoism and divination have often been in a conflictual relationship, culminating in the outright rejection and even the prohibition of the mantic arts.

The present chapter of the *Handbook of Divination and Prognostication in China* attempts to survey some of the main sources, subjects, and issues relevant to the relation of Daoism to divination. The first section is concerned with divination techniques represented in texts of the *Daozang* 道藏, or Daoist Canon. The subsequent sections examine different attitudes towards divination in the history of Daoism, ranging from integration to compromise to interdiction. In the conclusion, I return to some of the main points discussed in the article. The appendix contains short notes on works on divination included in the Canon and in other collections of Daoist texts.

Despite their importance, I will not deal with other themes relevant to this subject, also in consideration of the fact that some of them will be the subjects of studies forthcoming in the second volume of the *Handbook of Divination and Prognostication in China* or in related publications. Most important among them is the uses of the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes) in Daoism, a vast subject

6 Robinet, *Taoism*, 170.

7 See Seidel, “Imperial Treasures and Taoist Sacraments.”

8 Chan, “The *Daode jing* and Its Tradition,” 12.

9 Boltz, *A Survey of Taoist Literature*, 165. Both Yan Zun and Hao Datong were versed in divination through the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes).

10 Penny, “Immortality and Transcendence,” 125–26.

11 See the translations of the *Laozi ming* 老子銘 (Inscription for Laozi) in Seidel, *La divinisation de Lao Tseu dans le taoïsme des Han*, 123, and Csikszentmihalyi, *Readings in Han Chinese Thought*, 107.

that requires more than one separate study.¹² I also do not deal with prophecy, apocalypse, and millenarianism, three major interrelated subjects in the history of Daoism form the beginning of our era until at least the seventh century,¹³ with “spirit-writing” (*fúji* 扶乩), which is at the origins of several Daoist texts from the Qing period onwards and possibly earlier;¹⁴ with dream divination;¹⁵ and with other minor prognostication practices in some ways related to Daoism, such as the use of the “divination blocks” (*gao* 筮).¹⁶

Despite these and other limitations, this contribution will fulfill its main purpose if it helps to shed light on a simple but significant point: not only Daoist textual materials, but especially the Daoist views on divination – including those that are critical or thoroughly adverse – should be taken into account for an understanding of divination, its history, and its techniques in China.¹⁷

12 In addition to Kalinowski, “La littérature divinatoire dans le *Daozang*,” 86–89, for brief notes on *Daozang* sources on the *Book of Changes* see Schipper and Verellen, *The Taoist Canon*, esp. 1:79–82 and 2:746–51. The main work on this subject is Zhan Shichuang, *Yixue yu Daojiao sixiang guanxi yanjiu*. Surveys of the Daoist literature on the *Changes* and of the uses of the *Changes* in the Daoist ritual traditions are also found in Liu Shaojun, “*Daozang*, *Xu Daozang*, *Zangwai daoshu* zhong Yixue zhuzuo tiyao,” and Chen Yaoting, “*Daojiao keyi he Yili*,” respectively. Studies on these and related subjects are planned for publication in a forthcoming volume provisionally entitled *Divination in Chinese Religions*.

13 On prophecy, see the article by Stephen Bokenkamp in the present volume. See also Seidel, “Taoist Messianism”; Mollier, *Une apocalypse taoïste du Ve siècle*; and the detailed treatment of portents in Hendrichske, “Divination in the *Taiping jing*,” 9–17.

14 For introductory but dependable remarks on this subject in relation to Daoism, see Esposito, “Daoism in the Qing,” 648–50. Studies concerned with spirit-writing in Daoism will be found in the above-mentioned volume on divination in Chinese religions and in a separate volume, edited by Elena Valussi and Matthias Schumann, containing papers read and discussed at the conference on “Spirit-Writing in Chinese History,” held in June 2019 at the Internationales Kolleg für Geisteswissenschaftliche Forschung (IKGF) in Erlangen, Germany.

15 On this subject, see Lin Fushi, “Religious Taoism and Dreams,” and the remarkable book edited by Zhan Shichuang, *Meng yu Dao* (I am grateful to Dimitri Drettas for bringing this work to my attention). It is worthwhile to add that the Daoist views of dreams include aspects that go beyond divination; see Radpour, “Daoist Views of the Dream State.”

16 While the faithful ordinarily use this simple divination tool by themselves when they visit temples and shrines, Adeline Herrou reports an interesting case in which a Daoist monk uses it in order to draw a *Yijing* hexagram on behalf of another person. See Herrou, *La vie entre soi*, 351.

17 I am grateful to Michael Lackner, who in the past several years has taught me much about the intellectual foundations of divination in China, and to Marc Kalinowski, who has read and patiently discussed with me an earlier draft of this article and has encouraged me to complete it. Needless to say, any error of perspective or detail is entirely my responsibility.

1 Mantic Arts in the Daoist Canon

As shown in the appendix to the present article, at least three dozen texts in the *Daozang* are entirely or substantially devoted to different divination techniques, including three varieties of calendrical divination, astrology, topomancy, physiognomy, meteoromancy, and divination by oracle slips. The present section contains brief notes on these techniques and provides, for some of them, examples of their uses in Daoism.

(1) *Hemerology*. Hemerology (*zeri* 擇日, “selecting days”) appears to be the only instance of a divination technique incorporated into Daoist practices without major adjustments, providing in this way “the knowledge, needed for all religious activities, of auspicious and unlucky days.”¹⁸ Examples of its application are numerous. In early times, the identification of propitious times was deemed to be indispensable for Daoist practitioners in order to begin their periods of retirement and practice, the literal or metaphoric “entrance into the mountain” (*rushan* 入山). The intent was not the identification of lucky days in a generic sense, but of days that ensure support by benevolent deities and protection from evil entities: a practitioner who “enters the mountain” without selecting an auspicious time would be punished by the spirits.¹⁹ In the “Inner Chapters” (“*Neipian* 內篇”) of his *Baopu zi* 抱樸子 (The Master Who Embraces Spontaneous Nature), Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343) mentions several calendrical interdictions.²⁰ A related major source of early medieval Daoism contains more examples, including the following one:

To enter a mountain or [cross] a watercourse, the protective (*bao*), righteous (*yi*) and responsible (*zhuan*) days are very auspicious; you will easily attain the Dao. If you enter a mountain on a controlled (*zhi*) or a subdued (*fa*) day, you will certainly die.

入山水之日，當以保日及義日、專日，大吉，易得道。以制日、伐日入山，必死。²¹

18 Robinet, *Taoism*, 93. On Daoism and hemerology, see Kalinowski, “La littérature divinatoire,” 95–103; Sakade, “Divination as Daoist Practice,” 547–49 and 557–58; Andersen, “Talking to the Gods,” 6–8; Hendrichske, “Divination in the *Taiping jing*,” 43–44.

19 *Baopu zi neipian* (hereafter *Baopu zi*), 17.299 (see Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion in the China of A.D. 320*, 280).

20 *Baopu zi*, 17.301 (Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion*, 283).

21 *Lingbao wufu xu*, 3.8b–9a. See also the similar passage in *Baopu zi*, 17.303 (Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion*, 286–87). The earliest description of this hemerological method

Another hemerological method used in association with early Daoist practices was based on the so-called *wangxiang* 王相 (ruler and minister) relation between celestial stems and earthly branches (*tiangan* 天干 and *dizhi* 地支). Examples of its application include the transmission of practices, the collection of the *zhi* 芝 plants of immortality, and the ingestion of elixirs.²²

The Daoist Canon contains several works entirely devoted to hemerology, or in which the identification of auspicious days plays a central function. Especially important among them is the collections of “petitions” (*zhang* 章) addressed to the highest deities found in the *Chisong zi zhangli* 赤松子章曆 (Petition calendar of Master Redpine), a work to which we shall return later in the present article. Other sources are concerned with the ordination of Daoist priests, the transmission of scriptural corpora, and the compounding of elixirs. Beyond these and other particular examples, however, the divination of a favorable day – often performed in conjunction with the selection of an auspicious place – is widespread in Daoist texts. In the present day, an example of the application of hemerology is the choice of days for performing rituals. Two passages of the “statement” (*shu* 疏) read by a Daoist priest in Tainan, Taiwan, to open an Offering (*jiao* 醮) ceremony state, in John Lagerwey’s translation:

We have selected by divination this month, the 11th, 12th, and 13th days, to go, leaning on the Way, to the palace in order to set up an altar.... For three days and nights we will execute rituals: at an auspicious hour, we will beat the drum for the first time and then flame the oil to drive away evil.²³

Other uses of hemerology in present-day Daoism are documented by Adeline Herrou in her work on the Wengong ci 文公祠 (Shrine of the Lord of Literature), a Quanzhen temple in Hanzhong 漢中 (Shaanxi).²⁴

(2) *Dunjia*. Another instance of the indebtedness of Daoist ritual practices to the mantic arts is the *dunjia* 遁甲 (Hidden Period, or Hidden Stem) method of calendrical divination. Originally used to identify the auspicious or inauspicious nature of certain days, the method became increasingly complex during

is found in the *Huainan zi*, 3.277–78; see Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought*, 131–32.

22 *Baopu zi*, 4.82 and 4.87 (Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion*, 89 and 96), 11.198 (Ware, 198), and 18.324–25 (Ware, 304), respectively; see also Pregadio, *Great Clarity*, 83–84. On other hemerological taboos for compounding the elixirs, see *ibid.*, 84.

23 Lagerwey, *Taoist Ritual in Chinese Society and History*, 62.

24 Herrou, *La vie entre soi*, 337–43.

its history and comprises several variants.²⁵ Early examples of its use are given by Ge Hong, who writes that “if one wants to enter a mountain, one must know the secret arts of *dunjia*.” For this reason, he adds, he compiled a collection of materials that amounted to no less than “sixty or more scrolls.”²⁶

The purpose of the *dunjia* method consists in identifying the “irregular gate” (*qimen* 奇門), a position in the compass of space that is closely related to time as it changes in accordance with each ten-day cycle. The “irregular gate” is ruled by the Yin (female) spirits of the six days marked by the *ding* 丁 stem (the so-called *liuding* 六丁 or Six *ding*) and should be approached through the ritual steps known as Paces of Yu (Yubu 禹步).²⁷ In the form described by Kristofer Schipper and Wang Hsiu-huei, the spatial position corresponding to the *ding* stem is reached by walking six onward steps followed by three backward steps.²⁸ This practice is said to enable Daoist adepts to “hide themselves” (*yin-shen* 隱身, or *yinxing* 隱形), an expression that means both exiting the cosmic domain and becoming invulnerable to demons and other malevolent entities. Poul Andersen writes about the “irregular gate” and its spirits that they “represent the opening in the cycle of time, which leads to the world of nothingness beyond,” and “a ‘crack in the universe,’ so to speak, ... through which the adept may enter the emptiness of the otherworld and thereby achieve invisibility to evil spirits and dangerous influences.”²⁹

The six *Daozang* works devoted to the *dunjia* method testify to its relevance in Daoism. What is important to note here is that these sources provide an

25 On the general features of the *dunjia* method see Ho, *Chinese Mathematical Astrology*, 83–112; Ngo, *Divination, magie et politique dans la Chine ancienne*, 190–95; and Kalinowski, *Cosmologie et divination dans la Chine ancienne*, 384–86. On its adoption in Daoism, see Kalinowski, “La littérature divinatoire,” 91–95, and Sakade, “Divination,” 547–49.

26 *Baopu zi*, 17:301–2 (Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion*, 284). Ge Hong continues by giving examples of those methods. James Ware’s translation of these passages should be emended in light of the remarks in Schipper and Wang, “Time Cycles in Taoist Ritual,” 200–1, and Andersen, “The Practice of *Bugang*,” 33–34 and 35.

27 The Six *ding* spirits are also known as Six Yin (*liuyin* 六陰). They are matched by the Six Yang (*liuyang* 六陽), the male spirits of the six *jia* 甲 days. On the male spirits, see Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face*, 114–20.

28 See figure 7 in Schipper and Wang, “Progressive and Regressive Time Cycles in Taoist Ritual,” 202. On the technical aspects of *dunjia* as a Daoist practice, see *ibid.*, 198–204, and Andersen, “The Practice of *Bugang*,” 33–37.

29 Andersen, “The Practice of *Bugang*,” 34, and his “*Bugang* 步罡,” 239, respectively. An example of the use of this method is found in Li Zhongfu’s 李仲甫 biography in the *Shenxian zhuan* 神仙傳 (Biographies of divine immortals), translated by Campamy in *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 230–32. As practiced within Daoism, the *dunjia* method is closely related to the rite of Pacing the Celestial Net (*bugang* 步罡), studied by Andersen in his “The Practice of *Bugang*.” See also Schipper, *La religion de la Chine*, 214.

initial example of the significance of calendrical and other spirits in divination practices, and of the ritual features that characterize divination not only within Daoism, but in the Chinese mantic arts as a whole. With regard to the ritual features of the *dunjia* method documented by Daoist sources, Marc Kalinowski notes that, far from being independently created by Daoists, they were part of this method since its origins: “the entirety of the divinatory rites displayed in this literature is also found in the earliest treatises devoted to the *dunjia* method, testifying to the fact that the dependence of divination on ritual practices was a reality admitted by the diviners themselves.”³⁰

(3) *Liuren*. The third system of calendrical astrology represented in *Daozang* texts, the *liuren* 六壬 or Six *ren* Celestial Stems, is based on the *shi* 式, which, as noted by Kalinowski, “progressively loses its concrete sense of ‘divination board’ to take on that of ‘model,’ ‘device’ (*dispositif*).”³¹ The Daoist Canon contains three works specifically devoted to this method. Although they show traces of later editing and additions, they all originally date from the Six Dynasties. One of them, the *Huangdi jingui yuheng jing* 黃帝金匱玉衡經 (Book of the jade scales and the golden casket, transmitted by the Yellow Emperor), appears to be the earliest extant work on this practice.

(4) *Astrology*. Several *Daozang* works are concerned, in different ways and to different extents, with astrology. In addition to including the original source (now incomplete) at the basis of the later “star books,” these sources document the incorporation into Chinese astrology of concepts and techniques of Indian origin, and the existence of rites for the expulsion of inauspicious star influences.³² Other texts are concerned with the *benming* 本命, the “fundamental” or “natal destiny” ruler by a star – in particular, one of the seven stars of the Northern Dipper (*beidou* 北斗).³³

30 Translated from Kalinowski, “La littérature divinatoire,” 94.

31 Ibid., translated from p. 91, note 17. On the *liuren* method in Daoist texts, see *ibid.*, 91, and Sakade, “Divination as Daoist Practice,” 546. On its general features see Kalinowski, *Cosmologie et divination*, 382–84, and his “Les instruments astro-calendériques des Han et la méthode *liu ren*,”; and Ho, *Chinese Mathematical Astrology*, 113–38.

32 See Kalinowski, “La littérature divinatoire,” 103–6.

33 See Hou, *Monnaies d'offrande et la notion de trésorerie dans la religion chinoises*, esp. 106–26 on the Daoist notion of “fundamental destiny” and the related ritual practices in present-day Taiwan; and his “The Chinese Belief in Baleful Stars,” 193–228. Works describing rites for the deities ruling on one's destiny include the *Wudou jin zhang shousheng jing* 五斗金章受生經 (Book of the Golden Emblems of the Five Dippers Conferring Life; DZ 653, Song dynasty) and the *Beidou benming yanshou dengyi* 北斗本命延壽燈儀 (Lamp Ritual for Extending Longevity in Accordance with the Individual Destiny of the Northern Dipper; DZ 201, ca. fourteenth century). The former text is translated in Hou,

(5) *Topomancy*. The widespread adoption of topomancy (*fengshui* 風水, or *kanyu* 堪輿) in Daoism is documented in a book-length study by Zhan Shichuang 詹石窗.³⁴ Here I will briefly mention only a few of the best-known instances. Two sections of the *Taiping jing* 太平經 (Book of Great Peace), a source made of multiple textual layers but generally datable to the Later Han period (first and second centuries CE), shed some light on early views and practices related to this practice.³⁵ One of them warns that digging up soil and obstructing springs damages the Earth, which as a consequence would bring on calamities.³⁶ Concerning the construction of tombs, the text maintains that if a grave is built on a “benevolent ground” (*shandi* 善地), the ancestor’s spirit will protect its descendants; if, instead, the ground is a “malevolent” one (*edi* 惡地), it will cause harm. The efficacy of the site is divined by planting a seed into the earth and observing the features of the plant that grows from it.³⁷

Ge Hong describes two methods characterized by a significant feature: in both of them, the topomancy master is replaced in his function of identifying a propitious site by a text, namely the *Sanhuang wen* 三皇文, or *Writ of the Three Sovereigns*, the main “talismanic scripture” of early Daoism.³⁸ In the first method, the *Writ* enables its holder to determine auspicious places for both dwellings and graves, effectively making the role of the diviner and the selection of an auspicious day unnecessary:

If you obtain the method [of the *Writ of the Three Sovereigns*], you will be able to make alterations or begin construction work without inquiring about the correct site or choosing the right day, and your household will be free from calamities. If you wish to build a new house or a tomb, write several dozen copies of the [portion entitled] *Writ of the Earth Sovereign* and spread them all over the site. Inspect them on the following day. If

Monnaies d'offrandes, 40–49. See also the entries on DZ 1288 and DZ 1289 in the Appendix, sec. 4.

34 Zhan Shichuang, *Daojiao fengshui xue*. This book contains an extended survey of Daoist views of topomancy and of Daoist works on this subject. On the *Daozang* sources on topomancy, see also Kalinowski, “La littérature divinatoire,” 107–8; Sakade, “Divination as Daoist Practice,” 549–50; and Song, “Topomancy (Fengshui) in China,” 103–15.

35 On topomancy in the *Taiping jing*, see Hendrischke, “Divination in the *Taiping jing*,” 41, and Song, “Topomancy (Fengshui) in China,” 30–35.

36 *Taiping jing*, 45.116 and 120 (sec. 61); see Hendrischke, *The Scripture on Great Peace*, 260 and 263.

37 *Taiping jing*, 182 (sec. 76); see Hendrischke, *Daoist Perspectives on Knowing the Future*, 100–2.

38 On these methods, see Song, “Topomancy (Fengshui) in China,” 106–9.

a yellow color is seen adhering to them, you may begin the construction work there and the household will assuredly be rich and prosperous.

得其法，可以變化起工，不問地擇日，家無殃咎。若欲立新宅及冢墓，即寫『地皇文』數十通，以布著地，明日視之，有黃色所著者，便於其上起工，家必富昌。³⁹

In the second method, the portion of the *Writ* concerned with the Earth Sovereign (Dihuang 地皇) ensures that the grave's occupant grants protection to the person who performs a simple rite on its site. The rite consists in placing a copy of the text and a sheet of paper with his or her name written on it into the tomb. Ge Hong's summary concludes: "You will be free from calamities coming from the outside and from thieves. Anyone plotting against you will be sure to have their harm turned against themselves."⁴⁰ Protection from harm and malignant spirits is clearly the main purpose of both of these methods.⁴¹ The same is true of two passages in Tao Hongjing's 陶弘景 (456–536) *Zhen'gao* 真誥 (Declarations of the perfected). Here the selection of auspicious places has the purpose of offsetting harmful influences sent forth by the spirit of the deceased or by minor demonic entities.⁴²

Two works in the Daoist Canon are entirely concerned with topomancy. The first is the main Chinese classic on this subject, the *Huangdi zhaijing* 黃帝宅經 (Yellow Emperor's book of dwellings).⁴³ The second one is the *Rumen chongli zhezong kanyu wanxiao lu* 儒門崇理折衷堪輿完孝錄 (Records of the achievement of filial piety through the rectification of topomancy, in accordance with the principles esteemed by the Confucian School). This work is a

39 *Baopu zi*, 19.336–37 (see Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion*, 314–15). Yellow is the color of the earth in the system of the five agents (*wuxing* 五行), and its appearance on the *Sanhuang wen* scrolls signals the earth's positive response.

40 *Baopu zi*, 19.337 (see Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion*, 315).

41 In fact, even alchemical elixirs can perform this function with regard to dwellings for the living: "There is also the method of Xianmen zi 羨門子.... This elixir can quell the hundred demons, the dead people from everywhere who bring calamities and harm living's dwellings, and those who harm people because they had dug into the earth. No harm will come to us if this elixir is hung pointing towards the sources of disaster." *Baopu zi*, 4.79 (see Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion*, 84).

42 *Zhen'gao*, 10.11b–12a and 10.16b–17a. Both passages are translated and discussed in Song, "Topomancy (Fengshui) in China," 110–13. See also Sakade, "Divination as Daoist Practice," 550.

43 A recent translation of this work is found in Paton, *Five Classics of Fengshui*, 135–59. The Dunhuang manuscript P. 3865 is to a large extent identical to the version in the Daoist Canon.

large compendium on topomantic theories and practices, as well as a major source on the integration of topomancy into Neo-Confucianism, based on the principle that providing proper burial to one's parents and ancestors is an act of filial piety.⁴⁴

(6) *Physiognomy*. Although only one *Daozang* text is entirely concerned with physiognomy (*xiangshu* 相書), the role of this divinatory art in Daoism can be appreciated by looking at other sources, both within and outside the Canon.⁴⁵ One of them, the *Yuebo dong zhongji* 月波洞中記 (Central records of the Moon-Wave Cavern), probably dating from the late Tang period, is ascribed to Laojun himself and partly reflects the Daoist views of the human body.⁴⁶ Several other Daoist works mention the possession of the “bones of an immortal” (*xianqu* 仙骨) and other bodily features – in particular, thick eyebrows, high ears, square pupils, and a radiant complexion – as distinctive marks of transcendent beings. These accounts, which evoke not only the enumerations of the supernatural signs of the Buddha's body, but also the early descriptions of mythical rulers in the “weft texts,” culminate in the list of the eighty-one bodily marks of Laozi found in the *Sandong zhunang* 三洞珠囊 (The pearl satchel of the three caverns).⁴⁷

Another remarkable instance of incorporation and adaptation of traditional physiognomic views into Daoism is found in the Shangqing 上清 (Highest Clarity) practice of “untying the knots” (*jiejie* 解結), in which an adept generates an immortal embryo in meditation in the course of one year. In the first nine months, he receives the “breaths of the Nine Heavens” (*jiutian zhi qi* 九天之氣), and each time one of his inner organs is turned into gold or jade. In the last three months, he visualizes the Original Father (*yuanfu* 元父) in his upper Cinnabar Field, and the Original Mother (*yuanmu* 元母) in his lower Cinnabar Field; as their Breaths (*qi*) conjoin in the middle Cinnabar Field, they generate an inner immortal body. As Stephen Bokenkamp has noted in his study of this method, in Chinese physiognomy the bones are the main bodily feature

44 On the contents of this encyclopedic work see Zhan Shichuang, *Daojiao fengshui xue*, 87–91; Schipper and Verellen, *Taoist Canon*, 754–55; and the detailed summary in Song, “Topomancy (Fengshui) in China,” 307–28. On the possible reasons for its inclusion in the Daoist Canon, see Schipper and Verellen, *The Taoist Canon*, 37–38.

45 On Daoism and physiognomy, see Kalinowski, “La littérature divinatoire,” 108; Sakade, “Divination,” 550–52; and Livia Kohn's studies cited in the next two footnotes.

46 See Kohn, “A Textbook of Physiognomy,” 251–54.

47 *Sandong zhunang*, 8.14a–15a. See the detailed analysis in Kohn, “The Looks of Laozi,” 207–25. For the “marks of immortality” (or “of transcendence,” *xianxiang* 仙相) listed in the late-fourth century *Housheng Daojun lieji* 後聖道君列紀 (Chronicle of the Lord of the Dao, Saint of the Latter Age; DZ 442), see Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 355–59.

related to one's destiny. In the method of "untying the knots," the bones of the newly generated embryo begin to be formed in the second month of gestation; it is also in that month that the deities take note of the destiny of the newly conceived embryo – that is, of the adept's new destiny as an immortal.⁴⁸

(7) *Meteoromancy*. Two *Daozang* works are concerned with meteoromancy.⁴⁹ At least one of them, the *Yuyang qihou qinji* 雨暘氣候親機 (The atmospheric agents of rain and sunshine; DZ 1275), may have been included in the Canon because of its relation to the Daoist Shenxiao 神霄 (Divine Empyrean) school and its Thunder Rites (*leifa* 雷法).

(8) *Oracle Slips*. The remarkable *Daozang* corpus on the *lingqian* 靈籤 (lit., "numinous slips") consists of nine works, dating from the Song to the Ming periods.⁵⁰ As a whole, these works reflect the integration of deities of popular origin into the Daoist pantheon. Most of them contain between forty to one hundred oracles. Deities that bestow the oracles include the Four Saints (*sisheng* 四聖, i.e., Tianpeng 天蓬, Tianyou 天猷, Yisheng 翊聖, and Zhenwu 真武); Wenchang 文昌; and the Xu 徐 brothers, whose oracles are found in three different texts. This form of divination is still practiced in Daoist temples in the present day; a study by Carole Morgan documents the origins and use of oracular slips in a contemporary Hong Kong temple, the Wanshou guan 萬壽觀 (Abbey of Ten-Thousand-Year Longevity).⁵¹ Mention should also be made here of the *Lingqi benzhang zhengjing* 靈棋本章正經 (Correct book of the original stanzas of the numinous tokens; DZ 1041), a work dating from the Six Dynasties that contains oracles obtained by casting a set of twelve two-sided tokens.⁵²

(9) "*Fate Calculation*." Rather than a divination technique in the strict sense, *suanming* 算命 is a simple system for "calculating destiny," a literal translation of its Chinese name.⁵³ However, as one might also call it a system for divining the length of one's life span, it deserves a place in this survey. Once again, an early accessible discussion of this system is given by Ge Hong. At birth, each person receives a "personal cipher" (*benshu* 本數), which differs

48 Bokenkamp, "Simple Twists of Fate," 159–60.

49 Kalinowski, "La littérature divinatoire," 106–7; Sakade, "Divination," 545. On early meteoromancy, see Ngo, *Divination, magie et politique*, 186–90.

50 Kalinowski, "La littérature divinatoire," 89–91; Sakade, "Divination," 554–56.

51 See Morgan, "Old Wine in a New Bottle: A New Set of Oracle Slips from China," 1–20.

52 On this early work, containing commentaries by Yan Youming 顏幼明 (Jin 晉 dynasty) and He Chengtian 何承天 (370–447), see Morgan, "An Introduction to the *Lingqi jing*," and Kalinowski, "La littérature divinatoire," 90–91.

53 An exhaustive description of this system and its multiple variants is found in Kohn, "Counting Good Deeds and Days of Life." Kohn translates *suanming* as "quantifying destiny."

for each individual and determines his or her length of life. The best way to preserve and augment this endowment is to acquire merit. If, instead, one commits faults or sins, an amount of time – whose length varies according to the seriousness of the fault – is detracted from one's life span. The detraction occurs when the God of the Hearth (Caoshen 竈神) and the Three Corpses (*sanshi* 三尸) ascend to Heaven, the former every thirty days and the latter every sixty days, and report one's misdeeds to the Administrator of Destinies (Siming 司命).⁵⁴

One of the developments of this system is found in the *Chisong zi zhongjie jing* 赤松子中戒經 (Book of the central precepts by Master Redpine; DZ 185), dating in its received version from the Song period but already known to Ge Hong in the early fourth century. According to this work, one's destiny is determined by the star under which one is born. At that time, the Administrator of Destiny and the Administrator of Emoluments (Silu 司錄) place a shining talisman on each person's forehead. Immoral acts and evil deeds cause one's life span – initially set to 120 years – to become shorter and the light of the talisman to grow faint, in parallel to the body's physical decline. When the light is extinguished, one dies.⁵⁵ Further variants of the *suanming* system are incorporated into several other Daoist texts.⁵⁶ The most important ones include the fourth-century *Nüqing guilü* 女青鬼律 (Demon statutes of Nüqing; DZ 790), the mid-sixth century *Fengdao kejie* 奉道科戒 (Rules and precepts for worshipping the Dao; DZ 1125), and the sixth-century *Xuandu liuwen* 玄都律文 (Statutes of the mysterious metropolis; DZ 188).⁵⁷ The main heirs of these works and of the *suanming* system as a whole are the “ledgers of merits and demerits” (*gongguo ge* 功過格), which began to be widespread from the Song period onwards.⁵⁸

54 *Baopu zi*, 3.53 and 6.125 (Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion*, 66–67 and 115). See Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face*, 101–5, and the discussion in Pregadio, “Seeking Immortality in Ge Hong's *Baopu zi neipian*,” 444–45. The Three Corpses are demonic parasites that live in different parts of one's body; see Kohn, “Kōshin,” part 2: “Historical Development,” 34–55.

55 See Kohn, “Counting Good Deeds,” 835–41, and the translation of the *Zhongjie jing* in her *Cosmos and Community*, 154–67.

56 Kohn, “Counting Good Deeds,” 847–52.

57 On the *suanming* system described in these three works see Kleeman, *Celestial Masters*, 146–58; Kohn, *The Daoist Monastic Manual*, passim (cf. table 4 in “Counting Good Deeds,” 856–58); and Kohn, *Monastic Life in Medieval Daoism*, 207–8, respectively.

58 See Brokaw, *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit*, the first chapter of which (pp. 28–60) contains a survey of the earlier tradition.

2 Divination and the Diviner in the *Taiping jing*

This and the next sections of the present article are concerned with different subjects that exemplify the multiple attitudes of Daoism towards divination. The first source to be mentioned is the *Taiping jing*, or *Book of Great Peace*. Two brief remarks are necessary before we look at its views of prognostication. First, the textual history of this work is too complex to provide even a short summary of it in the framework of this essay; let it suffice to say that the *Taiping jing* is made of several textual layers, dating from the Later Han period (first and second centuries CE) onwards or possibly earlier, and that the received text was edited in the sixth century. Caution, in addition, is needed before defining as “Daoist” all views documented in this work: the *Taiping jing* is best read as “a link between what has been termed early China’s ‘common religion’ and the later Daoist tradition.”⁵⁹

That said, the *Taiping jing* presents a compelling and in several respects unique view of divination and the figure of the diviner among works found in the Daoist Canon. As Barbara Hendrischke notes, the authors of the *Taiping jing* “attest to the omnipresence of divination in late-Han dynasty China, where divinatory activity amounted to an ongoing dialogue between men and superhuman beings”; in this perspective, they “encapsulated and reformulated prevailing late-Han dynasty sentiments and ideas rather than attempting to oppose them.”⁶⁰ In the *Taiping jing*, divination is seen not simply as a means of knowing the future or seeking good fortune: predictions are undertaken in the first place to determine the intention (*yi* 意) of Heaven and to integrate it into one’s own religious and moral consciousness.⁶¹ Good fortune is the result of this integration:

Through undertaking a prediction (*zhan*) right and wrong become known.... Someone who peruses heaven’s meaning will share heaven’s intention and will be like a true spirit. This being the case, how should he not enjoy good luck?

占而是非即可知矣。... 審詳此意，與天同願，與真神為其安，得不吉哉？⁶²

59 Hendrischke, *The Scripture on Great Peace*, 3. My notes on this work are substantially based on Hendrischke, “Divination in the *Taiping jing*,” and on the selections translated in her *Daoist Perspectives*.

60 Hendrischke, “Divination in the *Taiping jing*,” 2 and 46.

61 Ibid., 5–6 and 32.

62 *Taiping jing*, 18 (from the *Taiping jing chao* 太平經鈔); trans. Hendrischke, “Divination in the *Taiping jing*,” 5–6.

Divination thus becomes a way of knowledge, and as such it suits multiple purposes: for the authors of the *Taiping jing*, it is “primarily a method of understanding, of ruling a state or community and of conducting one’s life, in a moral sense.... The great-peace doctrine of salvation was tightly interwoven with methods of divination, one shaping and supporting the other in that men needed prior knowledge of the arrival of a chance for great peace in order to be able to make the most of this chance.”⁶³

In this endeavor, the figure of the diviner is ascribed a major role. Rather than mere expertise in techniques, the *Taiping jing* expects that “the diviner’s moral and spiritual excellence would provide him with the power to succeed.... [S]uch power was the result of a process of self-cultivation.”⁶⁴ This point requires attention. In other cases, as we shall see later in the present essay, emphasis on self-cultivation results in a rejection of the function of diviner and his techniques: the Daoist sage is supposed to know the future without making recourse to prognostication practices. In the *Taiping jing*, instead, the priority given to “moral and spiritual excellence” leads the authors to ascribe a valuable role to the diviner and his expertise: far from being a prophet, the diviner’s ability in disclosing Heaven’s intention relies on his techniques, and these are made effective by his self-cultivation. Indeed, the diviner of the *Taiping jing* is similar to the “spirit-like men” (*shenren* 神人) of the past, who were able to prognosticate without the assistance of a specialist:

The spirit-like men of the past sought in person through divination answers to what was right and wrong and what would bring success and what not. Instantly then affairs became transparent; not a single item remained in the dark; all was clear and bright.

古者神人自占是非，得與不得，其事立可觀也。不但闇昧，昭然清白。⁶⁵

Hendrichske remarks that the process of attaining knowledge through divination “resembled the practice of meditation, in regard to both personal involvement and the outcome.” The assumed closeness of divination to

⁶³ Hendrichske, “Divination in the *Taiping jing*,” 4–5.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶⁵ *Taiping jing*, 718 (from the *Taiping jing chao*); trans. Hendrichske, “Divination in the *Taiping jing*,” 33.

meditation – seen in the *Taiping jing* as the main practice leading to salvation – “helped to attach to divination the label of a great-peace orientated practice.”⁶⁶

With regard to techniques, the *Taiping jing* focuses on topomancy, iatromancy, and especially divination by celestial stems and earthly branches.⁶⁷ We have seen above the text’s views on digging soil and on selecting auspicious sites for tombs. The correct observation of vessels (*mai* 脈) was deemed to be vital for healing illnesses, and while the treatment was based on acupuncture and moxa, a successful cure relied in the first place on what the *Taiping jing* cryptically calls “prognostic writings (*chenshu* 讖書) that match Heaven’s conduits and vessels.”⁶⁸ In a statement of interest for the study of Chinese iatromancy, the *Taiping jing* also describes the observation of the ruler’s own vessels as a mantic act that invests the whole cosmos: “The wise sovereign [of the past] ... observed the degrees in the flow of his vessels in order to predict (*zhanzhi* 占知) good and bad luck for all six directions.”⁶⁹

The third technique – divination by celestial stems and earthly branches – is closely related to a view of destiny reflected in the *Taiping jing*, less prominent than its well-known theory of the “inherited burden” (*chengfu* 承負).⁷⁰ This view is summarized in the following passage:

The fate destined for everything under heaven follows categories [*lei*]. So we know the fate destined for someone.... [T]he life of an ordinary person relies on which [stage of] *qi* of a phase he or she resembles. Someone’s fate depends on the date of birth according to stems and branches. Since a prediction based on category never fails, wise men of the past followed everything back to its source. Thereby they knew someone’s situation.

凡天下之名命所屬，皆以類相從，故知其命所屬。... 凡人生者，在其所象何行之氣，其命者繫於六甲何曆，以類占之，萬不失一也，故古者聖人深原凡事，知人情者，以此也。⁷¹

66 Hendrichske, “Divination in the *Taiping jing*,” 33–34.

67 On these three techniques and their use in the *Taiping jing*, see *ibid.*, 40–46.

68 *Taiping jing*, 179 (sec. 74).

69 *Ibid.*, 180 (sec. 74). This passage and the previous one are translated in accordance with Hendrichske, *Daoist Perspectives*, 96 and 98, respectively.

70 On the “inherited burden,” see Hendrichske, “The Concept of Inherited Evil in the *Taiping jing*,” and Maeda, “Between Karmic Retribution and Entwining Infusion.”

71 *Taiping jing*, 424 (sec. 153); trans. Hendrichske, *Daoist Perspectives*, 152–53. Interestingly, an analogous passage is found in the sixth-century *Wuxing dayi* 五行大義 (Great meaning of the five agents), translated in Kalinowski, *Cosmologie et divination*, 419.

According to the *Taiping jing*, a deity named Administrator of Time (Sihou 司候) “makes a complete record” of each person’s time of birth and assigned life span. Individual destinies are dispensed according to the auspicious or inauspicious relation between the earthly branches associated with the year and the month of one’s birth. Only proper moral conduct, however, ensures that one can live for the whole extent of one’s destined span.⁷²

3 Ge Hong’s View of the Mantic Arts

The hemerological taboos reported in the *Baopu zi*, mentioned earlier in this essay, were only one of several protective measures to be observed before “entering the mountain.” Ge Hong voices some skepticism about these and other methods when he says: “The conditions of Heaven and Earth, the good and bad luck depending on Yin and Yang, are so limitless that one can hardly examine them in detail. I do not say with certainty that these things exist, but I dare not maintain that they do not exist.” He adds, however, that the Yellow Emperor, the Duke of Zhou, Yan Zun (the above-mentioned diviner and early commentator of the *Laozi*), and Sima Qian 司馬遷 (the author of the *Shiji* 史記, or *Records of the Historian*) relied on those methods, and that calendrical interdictions are also mentioned in the Classics. He concludes that there is, therefore, an established tradition for this system.⁷³

Here again, we should refrain from looking at Ge Hong as a representative of the whole Daoist tradition – a viewpoint only shared in China by Confucians, for whom Ge Hong was one of the few authors who deserved to be read in order to learn something about Daoism in contemporary or former times. Nonetheless, his complex view of divination deserves attention. To appreciate its context, we should first note that he subdivides the religious traditions of Jiangnan 江南 (the region south of the lower course of the Yangzi River) into three main classes. The two higher ones are alchemy – in the form of Waidan 外丹, or External Alchemy – and meditation on the inner gods. At the lower end, instead, Ge Hong places a broad group of practitioners whom he calls “coarse and rustic” (*zawei daoshi* 雜猥道士).⁷⁴ Ge Hong associates them with

72 For details on this rather complex prognostication method, see Penny, “A System of Fate Calculation in *Taiping jing*,” and Hendrischke, “How the Celestial Master Proves Heaven Reliable.”

73 *Baopu zi*, 17.301 (see Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion*, 283–84).

74 In Ge Hong’s usage, the term *daoshi* 道士 does not mean “Daoist master” and even less so “Daoist priest.” It is, rather, close in meaning to, or even synonymous with, the earlier term *fangshi* 方士, “masters of the methods.”

the “minor arts” (*xiaoshu* 小術), which in his view include healing methods, longevity techniques, and certain mantic practices:

It is clear that if the present-day coarse and rustic practitioners do not obtain the methods of the Golden Elixir, they will not obtain a long life. They may be able to heal illnesses and bring a dead person to life, to abstain from cereals and be free from hunger for several years, to command gods and demons, to be sitting at one moment and then suddenly disappear, to see one thousand miles away, to know the rise and fall of any person, to reveal the disasters concealed in what is obscure and hidden, and to know the fortunes and calamities awaiting what has not yet sprouted. All this, however, will be of no advantage to increase the length of their life.

今雜猥道士之輩，不得金丹大法，必不得長生可知也。雖治病有起死之効，絕穀則積年不飢，役使鬼神，坐在立亡，瞻視千里，知人盛衰，發沈祟於幽翳，知禍福於未萌，猶無益於年命也。⁷⁵

In another discussion, Ge Hong again expresses distrust towards several types of divination, including the observation of the patterns of Heaven and Earth (*tianwen* 天文 and *dili* 地理, here probably meaning astrology and topomancy), prognostication by the winds (*zhan fengqi* 占風氣), various methods for computing destiny (*chousuan* 籌算), and the “examination of the eight trigrams” (*jian bagua* 檢八卦). Ge Hong’s assessment of these methods leaves few doubts: “All of these are inferior arts (*xiashu* 下術) and ordinary techniques (*changji* 常伎), troublesome and undependable.”⁷⁶

Yet, Ge Hong’s view of other aspects of divination is by no means negative. Elsewhere in his work, he rejects the idea that the principles of “prolonging life” (*changsheng* 長生) were only known in the antiquity. This, he says, is an opinion held by worldly people, which persons of attainment should not share. To make his point, he continues with a remarkable passage where he mentions several ordinary and uncommon mantic arts:

We predict the mysterious ways of the celestial signs and measure the [cycles of] plenitude and recession of the Seven Governors (i.e., the Sun, the Moon, and the five planets); we discuss the infringements and

75 *Baopu zi*, 14.259 (see Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion*, 240).

76 *Baopu zi*, 15.272 (see Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion*, 254–55, whose translation contains inaccuracies). On these methods, see Andersen, “Talking to the Gods,” 11.

enchroachings [in the heavens] that occurred in the past and examine the prosperity and decline that will occur in the future; we look above for subtle signs in the clouds and look below for [intimations of] prosperity and calamity in the hexagrams and the [oracular] bones; we manipulate the three [sets of] tokens (*sanqi*) to determine the success or defeat of armies in march and study the nine tallies (*jiufu*) to find out areas of good or bad fortune; we calculate by multiplication and division in order to examine the dispositions of demons and spirits; and we combine the six lines [of the hexagrams] to one another in order to settle the good or evil of fortuitous events. The origins of all this can be analyzed, and their principles can be investigated.

夫占天文之玄道，步七政之盈縮，論凌犯於既往，審崇替於將來，仰望雲物之徵祥，俯定卦兆之休咎，運三棋以定行軍之興亡，推九符而得禍福之分野，乘除一算，以究鬼神之情狀，錯綜六（情）[爻]，而處無端之善否。其根元可考也，形理可求也。⁷⁷

Divinatory arts such as those mentioned above, concludes Ge Hong, afford a knowledge of the “recondite order” (*aozhi* 奧治) of the world and therefore provide ways of “prolonging life” in any time, including the present day. It seems clear, thus, that Ge Hong disapproves of divination when it is performed merely as a means of predicting the future. He accepts it, instead, when it is used as a means of knowing the Dao and its operation in the cosmos and the human world.

4 Precepts and Codes: The Daoist Prohibition of Divination

Different mantic arts have been integrated into Daoism, and others have provided Daoism with conceptual frameworks for its practices. We also know, however, that Daoism and divination have often been in conflict with one another. This section presents the two main sources that document the Daoist prohibitions of divination.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ *Baopu zi*, 3.49–50 (see Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion*, 59–60, and Che, *La Voie des Divins Immortels*, 86–87). On this passage, see also Hendrichske, “Divination in the *Taiping jing*,” 35–36. For the emendation of *liuqing* 六情 to *liuyao* 六爻, I follow Wang Ming’s 王明 textual note to this passage (*Baopu zi*, 3.62, note 96).

⁷⁸ On the subject of this section, see also Nickerson, “Shamans, Demons, Diviners, and Taoists,” 45–47, and Andersen, “Talking to the Gods,” 7–8.

The first source is the *Laojun shuo yibai bashi jie* 老君說一百八十戒, or *180 Precepts Spoken by Lord Lao*. Originally dating from the mid-fourth century, this work is extant in several complete or partial versions, the most important of which probably dates from the sixth century.⁷⁹ The work is addressed to Daoist priests rather than commoners. The context of the interdiction of divination also deserves attention. Kristofer Schipper has assigned most of the precepts to the following main categories: eating and dietary precepts; respect for women, seniors and juniors, family and worthy people, servants and slaves, and animals; proper sexual conduct; precepts concerning one's own possessions (e.g., avarice) and other people's possessions (e.g., theft); and precepts against killing living beings.⁸⁰ Several rules clearly derive from Buddhist precepts, including those against stealing, killing, and not eating meat; others concern the prohibition of cults that require sacrifice of animals.

Four precepts are directly related to prognostication:

You should not seek to know of state or military events or to prognosticate whether they will come to a lucky or unlucky conclusion.

不得求知軍國事及占吉凶。

You should not read the stars or prognosticate the Heaven's seasons (*or*: the Heaven's times).

不得干知星文，卜相天時。

You should not design graves, erect tombs, or raise buildings for other people.

不得為人圖山，立塚宅起屋。

79 *Taishang Laojun jinglü*, 2a–20b. Quotations below are from this version, translated in Hendrichske and Penny, “The 180 Precepts Spoken by Lord Lao.” Another translation is found in Kohn, *Cosmos and Community*, 136–44. Other versions of the *180 Precepts* are found in *Yunji qiqian*, 39.1a–14b; *Yaoxiu keyi jielü chao*, 5.14a–19b; and *Sanyuan pinjie gongde qingzhong jing*, 21b–31a. On the *180 Precepts*, see Penny, “Buddhism and Daoism in *The 180 Precepts Spoken by Lord Lao*”; Schipper, “Daoist Ecology: The Inner Transformation”; Schmidt, “Die Hundertachtzig Vorschriften von Lao-chün”; and Nickerson, “The Southern Celestial Masters,” 262–63. On the variant versions see Andersen, “Talking to the Gods,” 9.

80 Schipper, “Daoist Ecology,” 84–85.

You should not possess the prognosticatory writings of the lay people or the *Chart of the Eight Spirits* (*Bashen tu*). Also, you should not practice any of them.

不得畜世俗占事八神圖，亦不得習。⁸¹

The first precept is generic and does not seem to refer to particular techniques. The second one also is broad in scope, although it might refer to astrology and hemerology. The two other proscriptions are more explicit: one is concerned with topomancy for the living and the dead, and the other alludes to the method of the Eight Archivists, discussed later in the present article.

After the 180 *Precepts*, the main source that documents an hostile relation of Daoism to divination is the *Daomen kelüe* 道門科略, or *Abridged Codes for the Daoist Community*, one of several works written in the mid-fifth century by Lu Xiuqing 陸修靜 (406–77), the first major codifier of Daoist ritual.⁸² Facing what he saw as a degeneration of Daoist priesthood and a decadence of ritual practices, his ideal was the restoration of the social and religious structures of the early Way of the Celestial Masters (Tianshi dao 天師道), including the regulation of ancestral cults. Addressing his work, once again, to Daoist priests, Lu Xiuqing insists on the prohibition of so-called “licentious cults” (or “illicit,” “excessive” cults, *yinsi* 淫祀), which include rites performed by spirit mediums and blood sacrifices to popular deities.⁸³ In his discussion of these points, Lu Xiuqing mentions healing and divination, two subjects closely related to one another in the Daoist views of the mantic arts.

Lu Xiuqing’s advice on these subjects is presented in three passages of his *Codes*. The first set of rules consists in a reminder of the Pure Bond (*qingyue* 清約) between the Daoist priest and the deities: do not accept money for performing rites, and do not sacrifice animals. There follow rules against the belief

81 *Taishang Laojun jinglü*, 4b–5a, 7a, and 8b; trans. Hendrischke and Penny, “The 180 Precepts,” 22–25 passim (precepts nos. 16, 78, 77, and 114). On the “Chart of the Eight Spirits,” see Kalinowski, *Cosmologie et divination*, 387–88.

82 On the *Daomen kelüe* (DZ 1127) and its author, see Nickerson, “Abridged Codes of Master Lu for the Daoist Community.”

83 On the proscription of these cults in Daoism, see Kleeman, “Licentious Cults and Bloody Victuals.” Lu Xiuqing presents a quite bleak image of the Daoist priesthood of his time, for instance by saying: “The things that in the Way are most tabooed, they eat! Then, having violated the prohibitions themselves, they go on to butcher chickens, pigs, geese, and ducks. They drink wine until they are awash in it, then in that condition go to send up petitions.” *Daomen kelüe*, 7b–8a; trans. Nickerson, “Abridged Codes,” 357–58.

in spirits and demons and the performance of ceremonies in their homage, and against sacrifices and prayers for blessings. A further important proscription concerns healing:

In curing illness one does not use acupuncture, moxa, or hot liquid medicines. One only ingests talismans, drinks [talismanic] water, confesses one's sins, corrects one's behavior, and sends a petition – and that is all.

治病不針灸揚藥，唯服符飲水，首罪改行，章奏而已。⁸⁴

It is in this context that Lu Xiujing mentions two rules related to divination. The first is concerned with hemerology:

When choosing a site for a dwelling-place, installing a sepulcher, or moving house – when moving, coming to rest, or in all the hundred affairs – not divining for a lucky day or making inquiries concerning auspicious times, simply following one's heart, avoiding or inclining toward nothing is called the Bond (*or*: “is called restraint,” *yue*).

居宅安塚，移徙動止，百事不卜日問時，任心而行，無所避就，謂約。⁸⁵

Second, one should not rely on spirits and deities to forecast the auspicious and the inauspicious:

Weighing the words of demons and gods in order to divine auspiciousness and inauspiciousness is called “calamitous.”

稱鬼神語，占察吉凶，謂之祲。⁸⁶

An additional proscription concerns the dwellings for both the living and the dead:

84 *Daomen kelüe*, 8a; trans. Nickerson, “Abridged Codes,” 358. On this and the three passages quoted below, see also Andersen, “Talking to the Gods,” 8.

85 *Daomen kelüe*, 8a; trans. Nickerson, “Abridged Codes,” 358.

86 *Daomen kelüe*, 8a; trans. Nickerson, “Abridged Codes,” 358.

As for writing charts, and thus divining the baneful geomantic influences of the sites of sepulchers and dwellings, one ought instead to send up a petition to exorcise those influences. To persist in using calendars to pick days and choose times is even more stupidly obstreperous.

書是圖占、塚宅、地基、堪輿、凶咎之屬，須上章驅除。乃復有曆，揀日擇時，愚僻轉甚。⁸⁷

In the passages quoted above, Lu Xiujing also shows what, in his view, the correct attitude of the Daoist priest should be. Concerning hemerology, the priest should “follow his heart (*renxin* 任心), avoiding or inclining toward nothing.” As we shall see later in this essay, these words echo – in the substance, if not in the letter – those found in earlier and later Daoist works that reject divination in favor of an intuitive and immediate knowledge of the auspicious and the inauspicious. The rules on healing and topomancy are more detailed and remarkably similar: both require sending a “petition” (*zhang*) to Heaven in order to cure illnesses or to exorcise baneful influences. As we shall see in the next section, this point is of crucial importance to understand the attitude towards divination reflected in Lu Xiujing’s work, as well as the role played by petitions in one of the few known attempts to consolidate the functions of the Daoist priest and the diviner.

5 From Antagonism to Complementarity: Mantic Diagnosis and Ritual Healing

A Daoist tomb ordinance (*muquan* 墓券) written on behalf of a deceased Tianshi dao priest in 433 – during Lu Xiujing’s lifetime – suggests that Lu’s rejection of divination was not only his personal concern, but was shared by larger segments of the Daoist community. The ordinance underlines the fact that the burial had taken place without recourse to prognostication practices – hemerology and, apparently, topomancy – when it states: “In accordance with the Law of the Way of the Most High and all the Lords and Elders, [the family of the deceased] did not dare to select a time or choose a day, and they did not avoid the subterrestrial prohibitions and taboos. Their actions in the Way have been upright and perfect, and they have not inquired of the turtle or milfoil.”⁸⁸

⁸⁷ *Daomen kelüe*, 8a–b; trans. Nickerson, “Abridged Codes,” 358.

⁸⁸ Nickerson, “Taoism, Death, and Bureaucracy in Early Medieval China,” 176; also in Andersen, “Talking to the Gods,” 7–8.

But more than any single mantic art per se, what is rejected in the 180 *Precepts* and the *Abridged Codes* is the figure and the role of the diviner. The reason is apparent: not unlike the main competitor of the Daoist priest in the religious sphere – namely, the spirit-medium – the diviner operates in a domain closely related to the one in which the priest also operates, but on the basis of different principles and by means of different techniques, and therefore is seen by the priest as an antagonist. The prohibition of divination for healing purposes is the clearest example of this conflict. The early Way of the Celestial Masters, to which Lu Xiuqing ideally refers in his *Codes*, provided a fundamental model for dealing with misfortune in its healing rite. Since illnesses were seen as the result of sins or moral faults, and not of “destiny” per se, the priest, following a confession of the sin committed, addressed a written petition to the main deities asking for pardon on behalf of the ill person.⁸⁹ As Peter Nickerson points out, here lies the reason for the rejection of divination: “The notion that misfortune might be due to fate (and thus subject to divinatory discovery) directly undercut Taoists’ own notion that illness and other forms of misfortune were the results of sin.”⁹⁰

Despite this, the solution found by the Celestial Masters in the sixth and seventh centuries made possible a shift from antagonism to complementarity: “The medium [here, the diviner] provided the diagnosis; the Taoist effected the cure.”⁹¹ The main source on this development is the above-mentioned *Chisong zi zhangli*, a work dating from the Tang period but containing earlier materials. Nickerson’s analysis of this source highlights three main points. The role of the diviner is preliminary to the role of the Daoist priest; in this way, the mantic arts are subordinated to the Daoist rites; and by subordinating divination to the Daoist rites, the priest was able to incorporate the deities and spirits associated with the mantic practices into the Daoist pantheon, and therefore to obtain control on them.

Nickerson provides several examples of divinations followed by the Daoist rite of petitioning.⁹² I will refer here only to one typical instance, concerning a man who was experiencing health issues. In the first part of the process, the diviner, using his “arts of calculation” (*suanshu* 算術), identifies the cause of the illness in one of the man’s ancestors, who was not receiving the proper

89 On the healing ritual in the early Way of the Celestial Masters, see Kleeman, *Celestial Masters*, 353–69. For parallels in the *Taiping jing*, see Tsuchiya, “Confession of Sins and Awareness of Self in the *Taiping jing*.”

90 Nickerson, “Taoism, Death, and Bureaucracy,” 489.

91 Ibid., 487. On this subject, see also Nickerson, “Shamans, Demons, Diviners, and Taoists,” which, however, omits most of the materials referred to below.

92 Nickerson, “Taoism, Death, and Bureaucracy,” 485–520 passim.

ancestral offerings. In the second part, the priest, through a petition, asks the deities to heal the supplicant's illness, and – for a final solution to the problem – that they grant the ancestor's soul permission to leave the netherworld and rise to Heaven.⁹³

This two-stage process replicates instances visible in several forms of Chinese iatromancy, where the diviner's prognosis is followed by a ritual ceremony, an exorcist performance, or the cure by a physician.⁹⁴ With regard to our present subject, however, the relation between the mantic expert and the ritual master takes on a further important aspect. The subordination of the mantic arts to the Daoist rites did not merely occur by attributing a preliminary role to the diviner: as Nickerson notes, "divination and the principles on which it was based were hierarchically subordinated within a larger framework, whose overall import was determined by Taoist cosmology and ethical principles."⁹⁵ This larger framework consists of the Daoist pantheon and its bureaucracy. The priest's intention in cooperating with the diviner was to upgrade the spirits associated with the mantic practices to the rank of minor "celestial officials," and thus incorporate them into that system. This point clarifies the Daoist priest's perspective on this remarkable attempt of compromise between his functions and those of the diviner: it was only by incorporating the spirits related to divination into the Daoist celestial bureaucracy that the priest could obtain control on them and accept the related mantic practices.

6 "Visionary Divination" and the Eight Archivists

As we have seen, Ge Hong rejects several divination techniques as "inferior arts" (*xiashu*). In the same passage of his work, however, he gives details on five methods through which, he says, one can "enter the divine" (*rushen* 入神).⁹⁶ Remarkably, Ge Hong draws this expression from the "Xici 繫辭" (Appended Sayings) appendix of the *Book of Changes*, suggesting in this way that those methods were as effective as the consultation of the *Changes*. The five methods pertain to what Poul Andersen has called "visionary divination."⁹⁷ They

93 *Chisong zi zhangli* (DZ 615), 4.16b–17a; Nickerson, "Taoism, Death, and Bureaucracy," 502.

94 On iatromancy, see Harper, "Physicians and Diviners," and his "Iatromancy." Hendrichske, "Divination in the *Taiping jing*," 41, also notes that "for authors of the *Taiping jing* healing was supposed to be guided by a *chen* 識 'prognostic.'"

95 Nickerson, "Taoism, Death, and Bureaucracy," 513.

96 *Baopu zi*, 15.272 (see Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion*, 255).

97 Andersen, "Talking to the Gods," 11–12. See also Raz, "Time Manipulation in Early Daoist Ritual," 31–32, and Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 96.

are not based on cosmological frameworks and do not rely on calculations or technical tools. Strictly speaking, in fact, they are not techniques of prediction, but different methods characterized by the same purpose: summoning deities and questioning them on various subjects, including the future.

Once again, the first of these methods relies on the *Sanhuang wen*, or *Writ of the Three Sovereigns*. Through its talismans, one is able to summon several divine beings who, requested by the practitioner, enable him to “know all things in advance”:

Some employ the *Celestial Writ of the Three Sovereigns* to summon the Administrator of Destiny (Siming), the Administrator of Dangers (Siwei), the Lords of the Five Sacred Mountains, the Borough Clerks of the Paths, and the Numina of the Six *ding* [celestial stems]. [The *Writ*] enables one to see them all and question them about any matter. Then the auspicious and the inauspicious will be as clear as if they were retained in the palm of one's hand, and it will be possible to know all things in advance, no matter how far or near, obscure or profound.

或以三皇天文，召司命司危五岳之君，阡陌亭長六丁之靈，皆使人見之，而對問以諸事，則吉凶昭然，若存諸掌，無遠近幽深，咸可先知也。⁹⁸

Remarkably, in this method one of the sets of divine beings that respond to the adept's questions consists of the same female deities also active in the *dunjia* system, here called Numina of the Six *ding* (*liuding zhi ling* 六丁之靈). They are mentioned again under the name Six Yin (*liuyin* 六陰) in one of the three other methods, which consist in summoning by different means – including minor rites and the ingestion of drugs – divine beings that provide knowledge of the future:

Some summon the Jade Women of the Six Yin. This method is completed in sixty days; after its completion, one will be able to keep them under his command for a long time. Others perform a ceremony to make the Eight Archivists (*bashi*) arrive. The Eight Archivists are the essences (*jing*) of the eight trigrams. This too will suffice to obtain advance knowledge of what has not yet taken shape. Others ingest the tip of a spatula or an inch-square spoonful of flowers of kudzu (*ge*) and awns and seeds of hemp (*ma*). Experiencing a sudden urge to lie down, they hear someone

98 *Baopu zi*, 15.272–73 (see Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion*, 255).

who tells them about unsettled things: then good and bad fortune will be firmly determined.

或召六陰玉女，其法六十日而成，成則長可役使。或祭致八史，八史者，八卦之精也，亦足以預識未形矣。或服葛花及秋芒麻勃刀圭方寸匕，忽然如欲臥，而聞人語之以所不決之事，吉凶立定也。⁹⁹

We shall presently return to the Eight Archivists. The fifth and most complex method involves visualizing Lord Lao, i.e., Laozi in his divine aspect. Like the “winged men” (*yuren* 羽人) of antiquity, he has the beak of a bird, an arched nose, bushy eyebrows, and long ears. He is attended by one hundred and twenty yellow lads and is surrounded by twelve green dragons on his left, thirty-six white tigers on his right, twenty-four vermilion sparrows before him, and seventy-two dark warriors behind him. With a clear allusion to his prognostic powers, “his feet bear the marks of the eight trigrams, and he lies on a divine tortoise.” Ge Hong concludes: “If you see Lord Lao, your years will be extended, your heart will be like the Sun and the Moon, and there will be nothing that you don’t know.”¹⁰⁰

Before we continue, it is worthy of note that, in other cases, the power of summoning deities in order to “know all matters in the world” is granted not by meditation techniques, but by Ge Hong’s other favorite practice, namely the compounding and ingestion of alchemical elixirs. Ge Hong quotes the following method from an anonymous and now-lost source, which again mentions the female *dunjia* spirits:

Then there is the method of the Elixir of the Jade Pillar. Mix cinnabar with a Flowery Pond (*huachi*). Place it between powdered malachite and sulphur. Insert it into a bamboo cylinder and place it in sand. Steam it for fifty days. If you ingest it for one hundred days, jade women, [the deities of] the six *jia* and six *ding* [stems], and divine women will come to attend on you, and you can command them. You will know all matters in the world.

又玉柱丹法，以華池和丹，以曾青硫黃末覆之薦之，內笥中沙中，蒸之五十日，服之百日，玉女六甲六丁神女來侍之，可役使，知天下之事也。¹⁰¹

99 *Baopu zi*, 15.273 (see Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion*, 255).

100 *Baopu zi*, 15.273–74 (see Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion*, 255–57).

101 *Baopu zi*, 4.81–82 (see Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion*, 88). The Flowery Pond is a liquid compound based on vinegar.

In one of the methods seen above, Ge Hong refers to the Eight Archivists, whom we have already met under the name of Eight Spirits in the *180 Precepts Spoken by Lord Lao*. Elsewhere, he also cites a *Bashi tu* 八史圖 (Chart of the Eight Archivists), probably related to the *Chart of the Eight Spirits* mentioned in the *180 Precepts*.¹⁰² The Eight Archivists are the spirits of the eight trigrams, which together with the twelve earthly branches form the cosmological framework of an elaborate ritual and meditative practice. Two main versions of the practice are described in *Daozang* texts. Andersen summarizes as follows the ritual described in one of them:

The spirits are said to be divided in couples.... Each couple descends into people's homes for a period of three days, followed immediately by the descent of the next couple, and so on through a cycle of twelve days. If one wishes to consult them, one must first fast for a period of one hundred days, then place a set of eight talismans written on wooden tablets in the eight directions, and on the day of the descent of a couple arrange offerings for the two spirits.... One must call out their names and may then ask them questions about all matters, including the future.¹⁰³

The second version of the ritual is based on the same cosmological framework. After the establishment of the ritual area and a period of purifications, the Eight Archivists enter the house of the practitioner. "The spirits will then talk to you. You must ask the Eight Archivists about seeking the methods of spiritual transcendence and long life."¹⁰⁴

7 Divination and Self-cultivation

The traditions based on self-cultivation practices bring to light other factors underlying the controversial relation of Daoism to divination. One of the most important among them has been pointed out by Michael Puett with regard to one of the *Guanzi* 管子 chapters devoted to self-cultivation, namely the "Neiye 內業" (Inner Training), dating from the late fourth century BCE. Whether this

102 *Baopu zi*, 333 (see Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion*, 382). In addition to the studies by Andersen and Raz cited in the two following footnotes, on the Eight Archivists see Steavu, *The Writ of the Three Sovereigns* 157-64.

103 Andersen, "Talking to the Gods," 20. This version of the ritual is found in the *Bashi shengwen zhenxing tu*, 1a-5a.

104 *Wucheng fu shangjing*, 2.2b; trans. Raz, "Time Manipulation," 40. Raz summarizes this version of the ritual on pp. 37-40.

is an actual “Daoist” source is not a question to address in the present article; what is certain is that this work prefigures themes at the basis of later Daoist works on meditation. As Puett remarks: “Far from internalizing a shamanistic practice, the ‘Neiye’ is rather an attempt to bypass the work of ritual specialists.... By claiming to be in possession of techniques that allow the practitioner to obtain the power of spirits without resorting to the art of divination patronized at the courts, the authors were making an argument for their own authority: instead of trying to divine the intentions of the spirits and to control them through sacrifices, they claim the ability to divinize themselves.”¹⁰⁵

The most explicit passage of the “Neiye” on this subject is the following one:

Can you concentrate? Can you be one? Can you, without tortoise shell or divining stalks, foretell fortune and misfortune?

能搏乎？能一乎？能無卜筮而知凶吉乎？¹⁰⁶

Essentially the same passage is found in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, which – in one of the “Miscellaneous Chapters” (“Zapian 雜篇”) attributed to the “anthologists” or the “later followers of Zhuangzi” – ascribes Laozi with these words: “Can you embrace Unity (*baoyi*)? ... Can you, without tortoise shell or divining stalks, foretell fortune and misfortune?” (能抱一乎？... 能無卜筮而知吉凶乎).¹⁰⁷ Harold Roth notes in his translation of the “Neiye”: “The text speaks not of some internal numen or spirit but, rather, of a spiritlike or numinous power that can foreknow.... This foreknowledge also occurs without relying on ghostly or numinous powers either outside or within oneself but, rather, because of ‘the utmost refinement of your essential vital energy.’”¹⁰⁸ Romain Graziani similarly observes in his French translation of the same text: “L’énergie spirituelle n’a rien de surnaturel.... On assiste dans ce passage à un remarquable acte de rupture avec la vision religieuse et mantique qui imprègne le rapport aux

105 Puett, *To Become a God*, 116.

106 “Neiye,” sec. XIX in the text edited and translated in Roth, *Original Tao*, 82–83. See also the translation in Graziani, *Écrits de Maître Guan*, 18. A slightly different version of the same passage is found in another chapter on self-cultivation of the *Guanzi*, the “Xinshu 心術” (Art of the Mind), part 2; trans. Graziani, *Écrits de Maître Guan*, 46–47.

107 *Zhuangzi*, 23.785; trans. Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 257. If one of the two texts is the direct source of the other, the *Zhuangzi* draws this passage from the “Neiye” and not vice versa.

108 Roth, *Original Tao*, 107. Roth refers here to these sentences in sec. XIX: “It is not due to the power of the ghostly and the numinous, but to the utmost refinement of your essential vital breath” (非鬼神之力也，精氣之極也).

Esprits, aux *shen* [神].”¹⁰⁹ In another study, Graziani returns to the same *acte de rupture*, remarking that the “Neiye” and other early works on self-cultivation are “like a declaration of independence of the human mind from divinatory procedures.”¹¹⁰

In opposition to divination, self-cultivation is not a means to fathom the will of ghosts and spirits or to probe what they may know; it is rather a way of elevating oneself to the same level of apprehension, to the same degree of influential action on the world.... This idea first presented in the “Art of the Mind” [i.e., the “Xinshu 心術” chapters of the *Guanzi*] will gain popularity in texts imbued with Daoist thought and will challenge the traditional monopoly of court diviners and shamans over the spiritual world.¹¹¹

In this perspective, divination is not the only branch of knowledge to be rejected: “External practices and knowledge (ritual, divination, study of texts) are discarded in favor of a personal intuition of the workings of the Way within the self.”¹¹²

Despite the different context and the six-century interval, this attitude is not far removed from the one at the basis of the “visionary divination” described by Ge Hong, where practitioners intend to achieve a state in which they directly “talk” to the gods in order to know what is impending. In a poetical description of a Daoist sage, Ge Hong himself alludes to the fact that such a person possesses an inner “turtle carapace” but carefully hides it, so that it is not used for divining the future through the ordinary mantic arts:

He stores his Shine-in-the-Night pearl in a cave on high,
so that no stone from other mountains could grind it
he hides his scaly carapace in a mysterious abyss

109 Graziani, *Écrits de Maître Guan*, 18, note 24.

110 Graziani, “The Subject and the Sovereign,” 469.

111 Ibid., 499.

112 Ibid., 512. In a different context, one can find a simple, unsophisticated example of the same claim in one of the stories found in the *Shenxian zhuan*, concerning the otherwise unknown immortal Li A 李阿, who merely divined by means of his facial expressions. “Some went to consult him on affairs, but Li A would say nothing.... If he appeared happy, then their affairs were all auspicious; if he wore a sorrowful look, then they were all inauspicious; if he smiled, it meant there would be a great felicity; and if he sighed, it meant deep trouble was near.” We may read in this story an implied rejection of divination techniques in the strict sense. See Campamy, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 212–15.

to prevent the calamity of being pierced and burnt.

藏夜光於嵩岫，不受他山之攻。沈鱗甲於玄淵，以違鑽灼之災。¹¹³

Elsewhere – and in spite of his ultimately favorable view of the mantic arts – Ge Hong writes that the meditation practice of “guarding the One” (*shouyi* 守一) makes divination unnecessary:

Anyone who can guard the One will travel ten thousand miles, enter among armed hosts, and cross large rivers with no need to divine the right day or select the right time. When beginning construction work, changing dwelling place, or entering a new home, one will never again depend upon topomancy (*kanyu*) and the star calendar, nor will one need to observe the taboos of the Great Year (*taisui*), the Moon (*taiyin*), the General (*jiangjun*) [star], the [day of] monthly establishment (*yuejian*), and the noxious spirits.

能守一者，行萬里，入軍旅，涉大川，不須卜日擇時，起工移徙，入新屋舍，皆不復按堪輿星歷，而不避太歲太陰將軍、月建煞耗之神。¹¹⁴

In the late-sixth century *Wushang biyao* 無上祕要 (Supreme secret essentials), an encyclopedic work that John Lagerwey does not hesitate to call “perhaps the most ambitious book ever produced by the Daoists,” the final chapter states, in Lagerwey’s summary, that “the ultimate perfection consists in changing one’s own divine light – changing oneself at the same rhythm as the universe – and in *forgetting any distinction between good and ill fortune*, in becoming one with the absolute, and in recovering the lost celestial perfection.”¹¹⁵

Not surprisingly, we find a similar attitude towards divination in the traditions of Neidan 內丹 (Internal Alchemy). In what became the main text of these traditions, the *Zhouyi cantong qi* 參同契 (Seal of the unity of the three, in accordance with the *Book of Changes*), we read that if a practitioner makes errors in the choice of the elixir’s ingredients, he would immediately die. At that time, “King Wen of the Zhou can sort out the [divination] stalks, Confucius

¹¹³ *Baopu zi*, 1.2 (see Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion*, 31). These verses in turn may allude to a passage in the *Zhuangzi*, 17.603–4; see Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 188.

¹¹⁴ *Baopu zi*, 18.325 (see Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion*, 305).

¹¹⁵ Lagerwey, “Littérature taoïste et formation du Canon,” translated from pp. 482 and 484 (italics mine).

can divine with the images (*xiang* 象, i.e., trigrams and hexagrams),” but they would never be able to revive him.¹¹⁶ In the second most important Neidan text, the *Wuzhen pian* 悟真篇 (Awakening to reality), we read: “Longevity and untimely death, exhaustion and accomplishment, no one can know beforehand.” The proper way of dealing with one’s destiny, according to this work, is by learning “celestial immortality” (*tianxian* 天仙).¹¹⁷

8 Conclusion

This survey has shown that the complex attitude of Daoism towards divination results from the existence of favorable, limiting, and adverse factors for its adoption. As a whole, and in general terms, divination is in some cases accepted as a “way of knowledge”: in the *Taiping jing*, it provides awareness of the incoming era of Great Peace; and according to Ge Hong (who, let me say it once more, rejects the more ordinary goals of the mantic arts), it is valuable when it affords an understanding of the “recondite order” of the cosmos and of the operation of the Dao within it.

In several other instances, instead, the picture is more complex. Daoists have incorporated a few mantic methods into their practices in a straightforward way – the main example is hemerology, as long as it was not proscribed. More frequently, however, they have adapted those methods to their own aims: their main interest is not in divination per se, but in the patterns of cosmological emblems underlying some of its techniques, which they use as abstract templates for purposes different from prognostication. Examples include the reproduction of the “diviner’s board” (*shi*) in the layout of the Daoist altar and the adoption of the spatio-temporal pattern at the basis of the *dunjia* system for ritual purposes.¹¹⁸ Another example, different in its exterior forms but not with regard to attitude, is the use of physiognomy to determine not just the destiny of an ordinary individual, but the bodily “marks of immortality.”

At the opposite end of the spectrum, we have seen examples of a categorical rejection of divination. In early medieval times, the 180 *Precepts Spoken by Lord Lao* and Lu Xiujing’s *Abridged Codes for the Daoist Community* prohibit such practices as hemerology, astrology, topomancy, and even the method of

116 *Zhouyi cantong qi*, sec. 67 of the text edited and translated in Pregadio, *The Seal of the Unity of the Three*, 107.

117 *Wuzhen pian*, “Lüshi 律詩” (Poems in Regulated Verses), poem no. 2.

118 Needless to say, the most important and widespread examples of the adoption of cosmological models at the basis of divination practices concerns the *Yijing*. See note 12 above.

the Eight Archivists, in spite of its earlier and later adoption in Daoism. Further down the scale, we find branches of Daoism – Internal Alchemy and, in general, the traditions based on self-cultivation – in which divination per se is not an issue worthy of consideration.

Beyond this broad picture, several other points deserve attention. One of the major features that invests the different Daoist views of divination is the role played, in virtually all techniques, by benevolent deities that one tries to approach and by malignant entities from which one intends to gain protection. As we have seen, Lu Xiuqing states in his *Codes* that “one should not rely on spirits and deities to forecast the auspicious and the inauspicious.” The purpose of hemerology is the identification of days that ensure support by divine beings and protection from evil spirits. Female deities are active in the *dunjia* system, and Ge Hong writes – with regard to the techniques that he accepts – that “we calculate by multiplication and division in order to examine the dispositions of demons and spirits.” In topomancy, auspicious places for the living and the deceased are selected – with the help of a major Daoist scripture – in order to offset harmful influences sent forth by the ancestor’s spirit or by minor demonic beings. In the methods of the Eight Archivists one consults the gods of the eight trigrams, and in “visionary divination” one visualizes Laojun and several other divine beings and questions them on a variety of subjects, including the future. Finally, oracular slips available for use in Daoist temples and recorded in Daoist texts reflect as a whole the integration of deities of popular origin into the Daoist pantheon.

While Confucians may have tried to limit or disregard the function of deities and spirits in divination, their active roles in the mantic arts have been observed several times.¹¹⁹ With regards to the early “books of days” (*rishu* 日書), Marc Kalinowski has noted that “the aim of the divination is not so much to predict the future as to define and control the ritual protocols of prayer and exorcism which accompany the consultants’ requests.”¹²⁰ Similarly, “predictions concerning sickness always consist in determining the name of the spirit or demon causing the consultant’s illness. Once the source of the curse

119 Hendrichske, “Divination in the *Taiping jing*,” 8, remarks that Wang Chong 王充 (27–97 CE) contrasts “the foreknowledge of sages with that of divination experts who use ‘numbers and arts’ (*shushu* 數術)” and both of these with demonic prophecies involving spirit possession. Making these distinctions Wang Chong attempted to shrink the presence of spirits.” These words might apply to other thinkers as well within Confucianism and especially Neo-Confucianism.

120 Kalinowski, “Diviners and Astrologers under the Eastern Zhou,” 381.

(*sui* 祟) had been identified, it had to be exorcized by the appropriate rites and sacrifices in the hope of a possible cure.”¹²¹ As we have seen, with regard to deities mentioned in Daoist sources on the *dunjia* method, Kalinowski remarks that “the dependence of divination on ritual practices was a reality admitted by the diviners themselves.”¹²²

In light of the above, it seems clear that one of the reasons for the partial or complete rejection of divination in Daoism is precisely the reliance of the mantic arts on deities and spirits, usually of a low rank (when divination is performed by Daoists, instead, higher gods such as the Three Sovereigns or Laojun himself are involved). The religious dimension of divination is an ascertained fact, and this creates issues to the Daoists, for whom religious practices should be addressed to different divine beings and should take quite different forms. Yet, the problem may not be primarily with divination per se – otherwise Daoists would not practice it at all – but with the figure of the diviner. The case of the *Taiping jing*, which values the role of the diviner as long as he also performs self-cultivation practices, is remarkable but appears to be unique. In other instances, when Daoists endorse or tolerate different forms of divination, they are conducted without the intermediation of a specialist: this is clearly visible in the use of the *Writ of the Three Sovereigns* in topomancy, in the use of oracular slips that the faithful draw by themselves in Daoist shrines and temples, and – perhaps the most extreme, but also the clearest example – in “visionary divination.”

This adds a further level of complexity to the subject that we have been discussing, already sufficiently intricate in itself. As Nickerson suggests with regard to the incorporation of prognostic arts by the medieval Celestial Masters, the view that they did so merely “in order to gain mass appeal” (in other words, in order to exploit the popularity of divination) is contradicted by a more elaborate but probably more precise view: “By allowing the use of divination to discover the ostensible causes of difficulties, Taoists perhaps made their own curative rites more effective by introducing into the healing process a sense of immediate, mantic contact with the supernatural. On the other hand, by relegating divination to a subordinate role, medieval Taoism managed to maintain its stance of superiority with respect to popular religion

¹²¹ Ibid., 353–54.

¹²² Translated from Kalinowski, “La littérature divinatoire,” 94. On the deities and spirits mentioned in the *Wuxing dayi*, see Kalinowski, *Cosmologie et divination*, 104–5 and 377–88. On their widespread presence in the “day books,” see Yan, “Daybooks and the Spirit World,” 207–47.

as a literate (and bureaucratized) tradition.”¹²³ To what extent, then, is the relation of Daoism to divination comparable to its relation to popular religion? And with regard to the figure of the mantic specialist – which, as I suggest, is the main problem for the Daoist priest – does the attitude of Daoism towards the diviner bear analogies with its relation towards the *fashi* 法師 (the “master of rites”) and the spirit-medium, his main competitors in the religious field? Both questions are worthy of further consideration; here I will only refer to one example, already discussed earlier in this essay, that may throw some light on this issue.

We know quite well that Daoists, since the time of the earliest religious movements in the Later Han period, have constantly tried to distinguish themselves from popular cults, most often with the rationale that the gods of popular religion are actually demons. In addition to labeling them as malignant and dangerous, however, there has also been another way to deal with the spirits of the popular cults: quite simply, it has consisted in upgrading them to the status of minor deities and incorporating them into the lower ranks of the Daoist pantheon. The *Chisong zi zhangli* offers clear examples of this strategy, and does so in direct relation to divination. The Daoist priest intends to subordinate the mantic arts to the Daoist rites. This does not simply occur by attributing a preliminary role to the diviner (who identifies the cause of the misfortune or the illness) and the primary role to the priest (who sends a written petition to the heavenly administration, a “literate” and “bureaucratic” act in itself): the priest is also able to obtain control over the deities and spirits associated with the mantic practices by assuring them a position in the pantheon. This is essentially the same strategy that Daoism used to deal with the gods of popular religion.

Quite interestingly, Daoism and Confucianism posit themselves in relation to divination in substantially similar ways: as literate traditions that reject, or attempt to limit, or at least try to qualify the scope and value of the mantic arts. As Michael Lackner writes in the introduction to the present volume, Confucians deemed – at least “officially” – the divination techniques to be examples of the deprecated “minor ways” (*xiaodao* 小道). The same can be said – here too, with due exceptions – of Daoism. The main difference in the respective attitudes may lie in the fact that while, on the one hand, the features of divination more overtly related to religious cults have been silently disregarded by Confucians, on the other hand they have constituted an issue

123 Nickerson, “Taoism, Death, and Bureaucracy,” 491. On this subject, see also Raz, “Time Manipulation,” 57–58.

for the Daoists, who have tried to deal with them in accordance with the teachings of their religion.

Appendix: Daoist Sources on Divination Techniques

With the exception of works concerned with “fate calculation” (*suanming* 算命) and with rites related to one’s “fundamental destiny” (*benming* 本命), this appendix lists Daoist sources entirely or substantially concerned with the divination techniques discussed in the first section of the present article. Several titles are cited in abbreviated forms. Where applicable, entries on works found in the *Daozang* provide references to more detailed descriptions found in Marc Kalinowski, “La littérature divinatoire dans le *Daozang*” (abbreviated as “K”) and Sakade Yoshinobu, “Divination as Daoist Practice” (“S”). Other descriptive notes on the *Daozang* texts cited below are found in Schipper and Verellen, *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang*, and in the Chinese annotated catalogues of the Daoist Canon.¹²⁴

(1) *Hemerology*

- DZ 615 *Chisong zi zhangli* 赤松子章曆 (Petition calendar of Master Redpine). Tang dynasty (contains earlier materials). A collection of “petitions” (*zhang* 章) addressed to the celestial administration for a wide variety of purposes, also specifying the most propitious times for their delivery. Defined by Marc Kalinowski as “a valuable and unique document for the study of medieval hemerology.”¹²⁵ [K 96–99; S 557–58]
- DZ 1240 *Zeri li* 擇日曆 (Calendar to select the [auspicious] days). Zhang Wanfu 張萬福 (fl. 710–13). Concerned with the selection of auspicious days for the ordination of Daoist priests and the transmission of scriptural corpora. Originally part of a much larger work on ritual rules, now lost.¹²⁶ [K 95–96; S 557]
- DZ 1267 *Jiutian shangsheng bichuan jinfu jing* 九天上聖祕傳金符經 (Book of the golden talisman secretly transmitted by the supreme saint of the nine heavens).

¹²⁴ See especially Ren Jiyu and Zhong Zhaopeng, *Daozang tiyao*; Xiao Dengfu, *Zhengtong Daozang zongmu tiyao*; Ding Peiren, *Zengzhu xinxiu Daozang mulu*, also valuable for its entries on non-extant works; and Zhu Yueli, *Daozang fenlei jieti*.

¹²⁵ Kalinowski, “La littérature divinatoire,” translated from p. 97. On this work, see also Verellen, “The Heavenly Master Liturgical Agenda According to Chisong zi’s Petition Almanac.” In the context of this work, divination is especially important in order to diagnose the origins of illnesses and cases of demonic possession. See above the section “From Antagonism to Complementarity.”

¹²⁶ On Zhang Wanfu, the author of the main Tang-dynasty codification of Daoist ritual, see Benn, *The Cavern Mystery Transmission*. On the *Zeri li*, see *ibid.*, 146–48.

Late Song dynasty. Tables for the calculation of auspicious and inauspicious days according to their association with nine stars, followed by a calendar of propitious days for various activities.¹²⁷ [K 102]

- DZ 1268 *Tianhuang Taiyi shenlü bihui jing* 天皇太一神律避穢經 (Book of malefices to be avoided, according to the divine prescriptions of the Celestial Sovereign of Great Unity). Song dynasty (?). Calendrical interdictions for compounding elixirs.
- DZ 1480 *Xu zhenjun yuxia ji* 許真君玉匣記 (Records from the jade coffer of the True Lord Xu) and DZ 1481 *Fashi xuanzhai ji* 法師選擇記 (Hemerological notes of the ritual master). Fifteenth century. Although they are separately printed in the Daoist Canon, these two texts form a single work. After a list of anniversaries of Daoist, Buddhist, and popular deities, the first text lists auspicious and inauspicious days for asking favors to the gods. The second text contains a similar list concerned with Buddhist deities, followed by an extended collection of other hemerological materials. [K 102–3]

In addition to these works, see also DZ 1288 and DZ 1289 in section 4 below. The *Zangwai daoshu* 藏外道書 (Daoist texts outside the Canon, vol. 9) reproduces Huang Zongxi's 黃宗羲 (1610–95) *Shou shili yaofa* 授時曆要法 (Essential methods for implementing the calendar) from a collection entitled *Zhenxian shangsheng* 真仙上乘 (The superior vehicle of true immortality).

(2) *Dunjia* 遁甲 (Hidden Stem, or Hidden Period)

- DZ 581 *Liuding bifa* 六丁祕法 (Secret method [of the jade women] of the six *ding* days). Tenth century or later. With DZ 586, 587, 588, and 857 (see below), this is one of five works devoted to the “secret method” of the deities of the six *ding* days. [K 93–94]
- DZ 586 *Huangdi Taiyi bamen rushi jue* 黃帝太乙八門入式訣 (Instructions of the Yellow Emperor for entering the framework of the eight gates of the Great One). Tenth century or later. [K 93–94; S 557]
- DZ 587 *Huangdi Taiyi bamen rushi bijue* 黃帝太一八門入式祕訣 (Secret instructions of the Yellow Emperor for entering the framework of the eight gates of the Great One). Tenth century or later. [K 93–94]
- DZ 588 *Huangdi Taiyi bamen nishun shengsi jue* 黃帝太一八門逆順生死訣 (Instructions of the Yellow Emperor on the progression and regression of birth and death through the eight gates of the Great One). Tenth century or later. [K 93–94; S 557]

127 A large part of this work corresponds to *Fashi xuanzhai ji*, 14a–24a. On this text, see below in the present section.

- DZ 857 *Liuyin dongwei dunjia zhenjing* 六陰洞微遁甲真經 (True book of the hidden stem of the six Yin [spirits] of the cavern of tenuity). Late tenth century. [K 92–94; S 557]
- DZ 984 *Xuanjing bixia Lingbao juxuan jing* 玄精碧匣靈寶聚玄經 (Book of the accumulated mystery of the numinous treasure, from the jade casket of mysterious essence). Song dynasty. A unique work in style and content, containing a synthesis of *dunjia* and *liuren* methods. [K 92.]

In addition to these works, the *Dengtian jun xuanling bamen baoying neizhi* 鄧天君玄靈八門報應內旨 (Inner meaning of retribution through the eight gates of the mysterious numen, by the Heavenly Lord Deng; DZ 1266), related to the Shenxiao 神霄 (Divine Empyrean) school and dating from the Song period, contains portions based on the *dunjia* method.

(3) *Liuren* 六壬 (Six *ren* Celestial Stems)

- DZ 283 *Huangdi longshou jing* 黃帝龍首經 (Book of the dragon's head, transmitted by the Yellow Emperor). Originally dating from the Six Dynasties.¹²⁸ [K 91]
- DZ 284 *Huangdi jingui yuheng jing* 黃帝金匱玉衡經 (Book of the jade scales and the golden casket, transmitted by the Yellow Emperor). Originally dating from the Six Dynasties. Possibly the earliest extant work on the *liuren* method. [K 91]
- DZ 285 *Huangdi shou sanzi Xuannü jing* 黃帝授三子玄女經 (Book of the mysterious woman, transmitted by the Yellow Emperor to his three disciples). Originally dating from the Six Dynasties. [K 91]

Materials on the *liuren* method are also found in the *Taishang liuren mingjian fuyin jing* 太上六壬明鑑符陰經 (Book of the most high luminous mirror of the six *ren* celestial stems tallying with the Yin principle; DZ 861), 3.9b–15b, a work apparently dating from the Song period.

(4) *Astrology*

- DZ 287 *Tongzhan daxiang li xingjing* 通占大象曆星經 (Book of the stars, with a calendar of their basic divinatory images). Tang dynasty. A catalogue of 162 stars and constellations, with illustrations and oracular statements concerning politics and individual life. Despite its lacunose state, the *Daozang* edition of this work is at the basis of the later “star books.”¹²⁹
- DZ 288 *Lingtai jing* 靈臺經 (Book of the numinous terrace). Tang dynasty. This text and the next one (DZ 289) attest to the incorporation into Chinese astrology

128 Detailed notes on this and the two works listed below are found in Kalinowski, “Les instruments astro-calendériques des Han,” 396–401.

129 For related works in the Daoist Canon, see Kalinowski, “La littérature divinatoire,” 103, note 60.

of concepts and methods of Indian origin, imported during the Tang period by Buddhist monks. The present work lacks about two thirds of its original content but is valuable for its quotations of lost texts. [K 104; S 554]

- DZ 289 *Chengxing lingtai biyao jing* 秤星靈臺祕要經 (Book of the secret essentials of the numinous terrace for appraising the [influence of] celestial bodies). Tang dynasty. See above, DZ 288. Includes the description of a rite for the expulsion of inauspicious star influences (1a–4b). [K 104; S 554]
- DZ 1288 *Yuanchen zhangjiao licheng li* 元辰章醮立成曆 (Practical calendar for the offering of the memorial of the original star). Tang dynasty. “[A] complete ritual of the Zhengyi [正一] tradition for the cult of a person's life-star, which presides over one's destiny. The second *juan* contains different tables for the calculation of a person's destiny, and prayers for averting the evil elements that form part of one's fate.”¹³⁰ See also the next entry. [K 99–101]
- DZ 1289 *Liushi jiazi benming yuanchen li* 六十甲子本命元辰曆 (Calendar of the fundamental destiny and the original star according to the sexagesimal cycle). Tang dynasty. An appendix to the previous work (DZ 1288). [K 101–2]
- DZ 1485 *Ziwei doushu* 紫微斗數 (Numbers of the [Northern] Dipper in the [palace of] purple sublimity). Song dynasty or later. Describes an early form of the homonymous method, traditionally attributed to Chen Tuan 陳搏 (ca. 920–89). [K 105]

Other *Daozang* texts containing materials on astrology include the *Beidou zhifa wuwei jing* 北斗治法武威經 (Book of martial power on the method of government of the Northern Dipper; DZ 870), probably dating from the Song period, and the *Taishang Dongshen wuxing zan* 太上洞神五星讚 (Hymns to the five stars, from the most high cavern of spirit; DZ 976), apparently dating from the Tang period.

(5) *Topomancy* (*fengshui* 風水, or *kanyu* 堪輿)

- DZ 282 *Huangdi zhajing* 黃帝宅經 (Yellow Emperor's book of dwellings). Late Tang dynasty or Five Dynasties. The earliest work on topomancy to be entirely extant. The first *juan* contains a general introduction to the subject, with quotations from several lost works. The second *juan* consists of explanations on two charts related to the Yang and the Yin dwellings (for the living and the deceased, respectively). [K 107; S 558]
- DZ 1471 *Rumen chongli zhezong kanyu wanxiao lu* 儒門崇理折衷堪輿完孝錄 (Records of the achievement of filial piety through the rectification of topomancy, in accordance with the principles esteemed by the Confucian School). Late sixteenth century. The first seven *juan* are devoted to different topomantic methods. The final eighth *juan* contains instructions for funerary rituals. [K 107–8; S 558]

¹³⁰ Quoted from Kristofer Schipper's abstract in Schipper and Verellen, *The Taoist Canon*, 1135–36.

Materials on topomancy are also found in the *Shangqing xiuxing jingjue* 上清修行經訣 (Compendium of *Shangqing* practices; DZ 427). The *Zangwai daoshu* (vol. 1) contains a *Da Han yuanling bi zangjing* 大漢原陵祕葬經 (Secret book of burials in plains and hills, from the Great Han Dynasty), dating – in spite of its title – from between the twelfth and the fourteen centuries, reprinted from the extant portions of the *Yongle dadian* 永樂大典 (Great canon of the Yongle reign-period).¹³¹

(6) *Physiognomy*

- DZ 1425 *Lingxin jingzhi* 靈信經旨 (Instructions from canonical books on numinous signs). Tang or Northern Song dynasty. Contains a portion in rhymes (1a–5a) that defines the auspicious or inauspicious qualities of several bodily marks (e.g., the color and luminosity of the eyes), and a portion in prose (5b–8a), attributed to the immortal Liu Gen 劉根, that interprets several facial symptoms according to the times in which they appear.¹³² [K 108; S 557]

(7) *Meteoromancy*

- DZ 1275 *Yuyang qihou qinji* 雨暘氣候親機 (The atmospheric agents of rain and sunshine). Song or Yuan dynasty. Possibly related to the Daoist Shenxiao school and its Thunder Rites.¹³³ The two main parts of this work are concerned with the influence played on weather conditions by atmospheric phenomena related to Sun, Moon, and other asterisms (1a–2b), and with weather predictions based on the shapes of clouds and their positions compared to the Sun and the Northern Dipper (3a–7b). The second part contains illustrations of the relevant phenomena.¹³⁴ [K 106–7]
- DZ 1276 *Pantian jing* 盤天經 (Book of celestial movements). Song dynasty or later. Concerned with predictions relevant to human activities and weather conditions, based on such phenomena as luminosity of asterisms, cloud formations, winds, and unusual shapes and colors of birds and animals. The commentary quotes several earlier prognostication works. [K 107]

¹³¹ On this work, see Ding Peiren, *Zengzhu xinxiu Daozang mulu*, 363–64.

¹³² On Liu Gen, see the hagiography translated from the *Shenxian zhuan* in Campamy, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 240–49, which, however, does not mention his physiognomic expertise.

¹³³ This association is suggested in Ren Jiyu and Zhong Zhaopeng, *Daozang tiyao*, 1008, and Xiao Dengfu, *Zhengtong Daozang zongmu tiyao*, 1240.

¹³⁴ Franciscus Verellen notes that the illustrations are similar to those found in a Mawangdui manuscript on astrology and meteoromancy, the *Tianwen qixiang zazhan* 天文氣象雜占 (Prognostications according to heavenly patterns and *qi* images). See Verellen, “The Dynamic Design: Ritual and Contemplative Graphics in Daoist Scriptures,” 162–63.

(8) *Oracle Slips*

- DZ 1298 *Sisheng zhenjun lingqian* 四聖真君靈籤 (Oracle slips of the four saintly true lords). Song dynasty or later. Forty-nine slips. Oracles governed by the Four Saints. Format: each oracle “provides an oracular poem in twelve verses of seven characters, a Holy Advice (*shengyi* 聖意) in prose ... a prognostic passage (*zhan* 占) in rhythmic prose, and a final poem in four verses of five characters.”¹³⁵ Closely related to, and possibly the source of, DZ 1482 (see below). [K 89; S 555]
- DZ 1299 *Xuanzhen lingying baoqian* 玄真靈應寶籤 (Mysterious and true precious slips of numinous response). Yuan or early Ming dynasty. A collection of 365 slips, related to the twelve earthly branches (*dizhi* 地支, thirty slips per branch) and the five agents (*wuxing* 五行). Oracles governed by Wenchang dijun 文昌帝君. Format: A short oracular formula, followed by an indication of the general nature of the prediction (e.g., *shangshang* 上上, “excellent”), a poem in five-character lines, and an explicative text. [K 89; S 555]
- DZ 1300 *Weifang shengmu yuanjun lingying baoqian* 衛房聖母元君靈應寶籤 (Precious slips of numinous response of the Primordial Princess, the Holy Mother Protecting the Bedchamber). Southern Song or Yuan dynasty. Ninety-nine slips. Oracles governed by the Holy Mother Protecting the Bedchamber, a deity associated with one of the main Shenxiao scriptures, the *Yushu baojing* 玉樞寶經 (Precious book of the jade pivot). Format: A poem in seven-character lines, followed by an “Explanation” (*jie* 解). [K 89; S 555]
- DZ 1301 *Hongen lingji zhenjun lingqian* 洪恩靈濟真君靈籤 (Oracle slips of the True Lords of Vast Mercy and Marvelous Succor). Song/Early Ming dynasty. Fifty-three slips. Oracles governed by the Xu brothers (Xu Zhizheng 徐知證 and Xu Zhi’e 徐知諤), canonized as True Lords of Vast Mercy and Marvelous Succor in the early fifteenth century. Format: Indication of the general nature of the prediction, followed by a poem in seven-character lines. See also the next entry.¹³⁶
- DZ 1302 *Lingji zhenjun Zhusheng Tang lingqian* 靈濟真君注生堂靈籤 (Oracle slips of the Hall of Recording Births of the True Lords of Marvelous Succor). Song/Early Ming dynasty. Sixty-four slips. Same governing deities and format as DZ 1301. [K 90; S 555]
- DZ 1303 *Futian guangsheng ruyi lingqian* 扶天廣聖如意靈籤 (Wish-fulfilling oracle slips of the assembly of saints assisting heaven). Southern Song dynasty or later (?). A collection of 120 slips. Format: An indication of the general nature of the prediction, followed by two-character prognostics related to several circumstances (e.g., “Marriage: Great achievement” 婚姻, 大成). [K 90; S 555]

135 Schipper and Verellen, *The Taoist Canon*, 2:1246.

136 On the Xu brothers, see Davis, “Arms and the Dao,” 149–64. For related works in the *Daozang*, see Schipper and Verellen, *The Taoist Canon*, 1210–16.

- DZ 1305 *Jiangdong Wang lingqian* 江東王靈籤 (Oracle slips of the Prince East of the River). Fu Ye 傅燁 (or Fu Yu 傅煜), 1225/1227. One hundred slips. Oracles governed by the Prince East of the River, a major Ganzhou 贛州 (Jiangxi) deity. Format: A poem in seven-character lines, followed by an “Explanation” (*jie* 解) and a “Holy advice” (*shengyi* 聖議) also in verses.¹³⁷ [K 90; S 555–56]
- DZ 1470 *Xuxian zhenlu* 徐仙真錄 (True records of the Immortal Xu [Brothers]). Fifteenth century. Among other materials related to the cult of the Xu Brothers, contains two different series of sixty-four slips (2.76a–95b). Format: An indication of the general nature of the prediction, followed by a poem in seven-character lines.
- DZ 1482 *Xuantian shangdi baizi shenghao* 玄天上帝百字聖號 (Holy appellations in one hundred characters of the Emperor of the Dark Heaven).¹³⁸ Song dynasty. Forty-nine slips. Oracles governed by Zhenwu, here called Emperor of the Dark Heaven. Format: An indication of the general nature of the prediction and a short oracular formula, followed by a poem in seven-character lines. This poem in turn is followed by other poems categorized under seven headings (wishes, family, marriage, etc.) and by an “Explanation” in prose. The text is closely related to DZ 1298 (see above). [K 90]

In addition to the works cited above, the *Zangwai daoshu* (vol. 17) reproduces a Ming-dynasty edition of the earlier *Lingji baozhang* 靈笈寶章 (Precious stanzas on the oracle slips).

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- Chisong zi zhangli* 赤松子章曆 [Petition calendar of Master Redpine]. Tang dynasty (contains earlier materials). *Daozang* 道藏, DZ 615.

¹³⁷ This work is introduced by the transcription of a stone inscription by the famous literatus Song Lian 宋濂 (1310–81), dated 1371, which tells the story of the deity's cult, separately printed in the *Daozang* as *Ganzhou shengji miao lingji li* 贛州聖濟廟靈跡理 (Inscription on miraculous events at the Shengji Temple in Ganzhou; DZ 1304). (The last graph in the title of this work is an error for *bei* 碑.)

¹³⁸ The actual title of this work, found on page 2b, is *Xuantian shangdi ganying lingqian* 玄天上帝感應靈籤 (The all-responding oracle slips of the Emperor of the Dark Heaven).

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Chinese Buddhism and Divination

Esther-Maria Guggenmos

1 Contemporary Caution*

In contemporary Chinese Buddhism, there is a general reluctance regarding the performance of divinatory practices, such as determining auspicious dates, calculating a birth horoscope using *bazi* 八字, conducting divination based on the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經) and geomancy practices (*fengshui* 風水). Even in Taiwan, where the historical burden of overcoming “superstition” (*mixin* 迷信) has not evolved into a matter of state-imposed politics, as is the case on the mainland, no abbot of any major Buddhist monastery can be found who would encourage his or her followers to consult diviners or engage in divination personally. Typical are statements like that of Ven. Shengyan 聖嚴法師 (1929–2009), the founding abbot of Fagu shan 法鼓山, one of the major Buddhist monasteries in Taiwan.¹ Divination would be experientially saturated, and therefore it would have reason. “Being Buddhists, we do not deny fortune-telling and geomancy” (做佛教徒來講我們不否定算命看風水), he states, but in Buddhism one would turn to peace (*pingzheng* 平整), sincerity (*zhengzhi* 正直), compassion (*cibei* 慈悲), and the objectiveness (*keguan* 客觀) of one’s mind (*xin* 心) to resolve problems. Fate (*ming* 命) would not simply be determined (*zhuding* 註定). Changing one’s destiny (*gaiyun* 改運) through mantic arts might produce temporary results, but a change in one’s mental attitude would be fundamental. Worrying about whether one’s fate is good or bad

* This chapter results from research conducted at the IKGF, Erlangen-Nürnberg. I am grateful for the steady exchange with colleagues from all over the world since the inauguration of the consortium in 2009. Without that intellectually stimulating environment, this research would be unimaginable. Having worked on aspects of this topic for my habilitation over the past few years, some points are argued in greater detail in my previous publications. Some final reflections from my German publication on divining Monks are translated and summarized in the second part of this article. See also Guggenmos and Li, *Wahrsagende Mönche*.

1 Fagu shan, or Dharma Drum Mountain, is one of the major contemporary monasteries in Taiwan. Its founder, Ven. Shengyan, received a PhD in Buddhist Studies in Japan, and had followers mainly in Taiwan but also considerable support among overseas Chinese in New York. He promoted Buddhist scholarship and a simple, reflective lifestyle, based on Zen-/Chan-Buddhist practice, which he termed “spiritual environmentalism” (*xinling huanbao* 心靈環保). For details, see Guggenmos, “Fagu Shan.”

or one's *fengshui* is correct or not would mislead the mind and constitute a form of superstition from which one should abstain.² Ven. Jingkong 淨空法師 (*1927), the internationally highly active founder of the Buddha Educational Foundation, with a strong media presence, in a video clip on the question of divination, demonstrates his support for this view by quoting the (probably modern) Buddhist saying, that “forms originate from the heart and conditions follow the movements of the heart” (相由心生境隨心轉).³ Jingkong concludes that one should concentrate on purifying one's karma (*ye* 業), which would be one's fate (*ming* 命), and therefore care about sentient beings. Other Buddhist masters, like the founder of Foguang shan 佛光山, Ven. Xingyun 星雲法師 (*1927), offer, at their monasteries, substitutional devices: satisfying the common habit of drawing lots to inquire about the future, mostly in a temple, a small red cylinder holds wise sayings of the master instead of the common oracle answers.

2 Retention and Prohibition

This general, ambiguous notion, that divination is not impossible itself, but that performing divination leads one onto the wrong path and detracts one from spiritual practice, can be traced in Buddhist literature. Already the Indian Buddhist texts distance from the mantic arts: they seem to attract little respect socially, and are designated as belonging to the so-called “lower arts” (*zuo chusheng ye* 作畜生業, pāli: *tiracchāna-vijjā*), but are seen as part of the knowledge repertoire of a Brahmanic society from which Buddhism tried to distance itself.⁴ In Chinese Buddhist philosophical treatises such as the *Dazhidu lun*

2 This passage is from an interview with Ven. Shengyan on DVD no. 8 in the series “Shengyan fashi: Da fagu 聖嚴法師-大法鼓” (Dharma Master Shengyan: The great dharma drum) and also available on YouTube under the title “Fofa ruhe kan suanming zhe yi jian shi.”

3 “Jingkong fashi: kan suanming ling bu ling.” The verse “相由心生 境隨心轉” is casually referred to in contemporary dharma talks as either a quote from the Buddhist canon or a Buddhist saying. It is sometimes given in an extended version as “命由己造，相由心生，境隨心轉，有容乃大。” Tracing the origins of that alleged quotation, *jingsui xinzhuan* 境隨心轉 already appears in Yogācārabhūmi commentaries, while *xiang you xinsheng* 相由心生 seems to be of far later origin. In the Chinese Buddhist canon, one does not find evidence that these two verses were combined. The saying may have been coined by a Buddhist writer of the nineteenth/twentieth century, who probably reached a broader audience. It is not part of the writings of Ven. Yinshun or Ven. Taixu.

4 This distancing from mantic arts can be found in a list of mantic practices from which one should abstain. It is preserved in the Brahmajālasutta, within the first large section of the Pāli Sutta Pitaka, and can be found in different versions across Asia. Chinese translations

大智度論 (The treatise on the great perfection of wisdom, T. 1509), attributed to the great philosopher of emptiness, Nāgārjuna, one also finds the notion that practicing mantic arts would obstruct spiritual development, especially if for the purpose of making a living.⁵ Such a conditioning of mantic arts seems specific to the Chinese Buddhist critiques of divination. Similarly, the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*, *Da bore boluomiduo jing* 大般若波羅蜜多經 (T. 220), raises the concern that divination might be counterproductive when one aims to develop the attitude of a Bodhisattva. It could easily be performed to increase one's own fame. Recognizing the emptiness of all appearances, one should restrain from divination "for the sake of pure conduct" (為淨命故不行呪術、醫藥、占卜諸邪命事).⁶ In the vinaya, the monastic discipline, members of the order are restrained from engaging in mantic and magic practices. In the *Dharmaguptaka vinaya* (*Sifen lü* 四分律), for example, the leading monastic code in East Asia, mantic practices are mentioned as improper, inappropriate behavior, especially for *bhikṣuṇīs* (female members of the order). Special intentions, such as the aim to restore one's health, safety, food, study, and the conversion of unbelievers, are justified exceptions.⁷ Similar to contemporary sources, the effectiveness of the practices themselves is undoubted but the restraint is due to a concern for the reputation of the monastic community, which could be damaged by these activities, as they are associated with monetary income and emotional dependency. Engaging in mantic practices might thus jeopardize the continuity of the religious community and so Buddhism itself. This concern makes the sanctions against these practices understandable.

render this list into a cryptic encyclopedic list, while texts like the Chinese apocryph *Brahmajāla-sūtra*, *Fanwang jing* 梵網經, T. 1484, transfer it into the Chinese mindset and stress the prohibition against the performance of mantic arts under certain conditions, such as with evil intent or for the purpose of seeking profit. A synopsis of all extant parallels is to be found in Esther-Maria Guggenmos, "A List of Mantic Techniques in the Buddhist Canon."

5 In this text, "divining and explaining to people the auspicious and inauspicious in order to seek profit" (為利養故, 占相吉凶, 為人說, *Dazhidu lun*, T. 1509, XXV:1509, 203a20) is enumerated as the third of five evil livelihoods (*xieming* 邪命). The author values Chinese Buddhism as not simply derivative of Indian Buddhism, but a tradition in its own right. References to Buddhist texts are, therefore, made in the language in which they were written or have been preserved. If there exist clearly identifiable translations, the original title is provided.

6 *Da bore boluomi jing*, T. 220, VI:674b18–19.

7 *Sifen lü*, T. 1428, XXII:754a17–b11. Further details on the arguments leading to the retention or legitimization of mantic practices can be found in Esther-Maria Guggenmos, "Rejecting and Legitimizing Mantic Practices in Chinese Buddhism."

3 An Emic Term?

In the prohibitions and beyond, mantic arts, like physiognomy, hemerology, or dream divination, are mentioned. They are variously addressed either as single arts or through terms such as *zhanbu* 占卜, *zhanxiang* 占相, or *wen jixiong* 問吉凶,⁸ which allude to ancient crack-making, arts that pay attention to outer forms like physiognomy, or to the ancient habit of discerning lucky and unlucky days, i.e. is the habit of ascribing certain qualities to each day that make it favorable or unfavorable for the practitioner to undertake single activities. These kinds of mantic arts, that intend to elicit knowledge about the future, seem to possess a certain proximity to magic practices, *zhoushu* 咒術, that imply the use of spells in order to transform future harm into benefit or intentionally cause harm. The “mantic” and the “magic” are often aligned with each other in the discussed passages.

At the same time, throughout Buddhist literature, predictive statements are a commonly applied means to structure narrations: the life of the Buddha, his past lives (*jātakas*), but also sūtra narrations, or even biographical works – in all of these sources experts other than Buddhists, the Buddha himself, or eminent Buddhists prophesize about outstanding events. “Vyākaraṇa”⁹ is even the title of one of the twelve traditional divisions of the Buddhist canon. It refers to guarantees of future spiritual attainment, often, but not limited to, buddhahood. Prophecies are an established narrative tool in the historiographical literature that not only drive the plot of the narrations, but also explain the connections between events, legitimize rulership, or demonstrate the explanatory power of Buddhism and the competency of its “Eminent Monks” throughout history.¹⁰

In the widespread versions of the legend of the Buddha’s life, the seer Asita appears as a standard topos which, during the prince’s childhood, refers to his extraordinary future.¹¹ Śākyamuni Buddha predicts the future of the buddhadharma, the general course of development, and the future buddhahood

8 Examples occur in the aforementioned passages of the *Fanwang jing* and *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*.

9 Skt., generally given in Chinese as *shouji* 授記/受記, variations include *shoubie* 授別/授蒯 and the early *shoujue* 授決/受決, also transliterated as *heqieluona* 和伽羅那.

10 Regarding the topic of “Buddhist interpretations of the past in China,” John Kieschnik is currently writing a monograph on the role of prophetic statements.

11 Cf. the various translations of the narratives of the life of Buddha, the *Buddhacarita*, a description of the Buddha’s life originally written in Sanskrit by Āśvaghoṣa in the second century, see, for example, the *Fo benxing jing* 佛本行經 (Sūtra of the past activities of the Buddha), which is regarded as Baoyun’s translation 寶雲 from the fifth century, T. 193, 1v:6ob1ff.

of members of his audience throughout the Lotus Sūtra. The biography of An Shigao 安世高 from the second century, a monk of presumably Parthian origin who is considered the earliest translator of Buddhist texts into Chinese, is based on his insight into karmically necessary future events regarding his own and other people's life course (see below).¹² These predictions are not normally associated with special divinatory techniques. Whether in life tales about the Buddha, the Lotus Sūtra, or monk biographies, the predictions are embedded in narrations which are told *ex eventu*. Referring to an imminent death or future buddhahood, or conferring legitimacy on a rulership, prophecies provide the reader with a glimpse into the future. Following the logic of the story told, the prophecies that surface tend to prove true. The impact that these narrations have on the community of believers can be traced in contemporary Buddhism: stories of outstanding females who are predicted to change gender in order to become a Buddha in their next life might be more easily contested in a setting that opts for gender equality. The Lotus Sūtra, as an assurance to all sentient beings that buddhahood is attainable by all, can serve in the contemporary believers' discourse as a highly motivational force through which Mahāyāna Buddhism spreads its message.¹³ Tracing how prophecies and predictions impact on the lives of believers appears to be a fruitful avenue for future research.

While there is no overall emic concept of divination or mantic arts that clearly shapes the field, any deliberation about mantic arts in Buddhism will eventually elaborate on the concept of supernatural knowledge (*abhiññā*, *shentong li* 神通力). In the *Dīghanikāya*, one of the oldest text layers of the Pāli canon, the *Dasuttara Suttanta*, in a tenfold enumeration, provides the basics of the Buddhist self and world understanding. The entry on the number "Six" deals with the six forms of supernatural knowledge: (1) to be able to change from one person into several, to become invisible, to walk through walls, solid earth, water, air, and to reach with one's body up to Brahmās Heaven; (2) to be able to perceive heavenly and human sounds from both near and far (divine

12 A detailed case study of An Shigao is provided in the following section of this paper.

13 While it is difficult to reconstruct, in a historical perspective, the mentalities of practitioners, I am grateful to Ven. Zu Guang from Minnan Buddhist College who, during her talk at the IKGf workshop on "Prophecy and Foretelling of Destiny in Buddhism" in November 2019 provided insight into the contemporary believers' perspective regarding the function of prophecies in the Lotus Sutra. The workshop will result in an edited volume by Mario Poceski. On gender change into the male form as, for example, reported in the *Fo shuo Asheshi wangnü Ashuda pusa jing* 佛說阿闍王女阿術達菩薩經 (Scripture on King Ajātaśatru's daughter named Asúcita as spoken by the Buddha, T. 337), see Dixuan Yujing Chen's contribution, "Prophecies about Women's Spiritual Attainment in the Chinese Buddhist Scriptures," to the workshop and future edited volume.

hearing power); (3) to understand others' state of mind, whether compassionate, liberated, or not, through one's own mental power; (4) to know in detail one's own past births; (5) to recognize someone's state as a result of his deeds (divine vision); and (6) to live with a free mind, with knowledge and realization through the eradication of poisons.¹⁴ This six-fold structure is transformed but basically preserved in the *Dhūrgāgama*: (1) unhindered physical possibilities (*shenzu tong* 神足通); (2) the power of the heavenly ear (*tian'er tong* 天耳通); (3) the power of knowing another's mind (*zhi taxin tong* 知他心通); (4) knowing fate (*suming tong* 宿命通); (5) the power of the heavenly eye (*tianyan tong* 天眼通); and (6) the power of erasing attachments (*loujin tong* 漏盡通).¹⁵ As this concept is a prerequisite, it is referred to in the narrative Buddhist literature far less frequently than one might expect. Narrations also attempt to apply forms of supernatural knowledge without really reflecting on the underlying concept. The sixth form contains, for example, the power to implement the basic insight of Buddhism that mental attachment causes suffering, which must be eliminated, so someone who has the power to prevent the emergence of suffering also has the power to prevent the generation of "outflows" (*loujin*). In the *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 (Song Dynasty biographies of eminent monks), Yong'an 永安, a Tang dynasty monk, is called "the master of no outflows" (*wulou shi* 無漏師), whose special ability was not to excrete anything.¹⁶ This may be an extreme example of a creative misunderstanding, but also shows that, at times, these stories may be fallacious when read through the template of the Buddhist teaching concepts.

4 Overview of Chinese Buddhist Mantic Arts

Between practically motivated prohibitions and the ascribed powers resulting from spiritual progress, the realm of mantic arts unfolded historically. In the Chinese Buddhist canon, adaptations of the temple oracle were integrated (see below).¹⁷ In search for karmic purity, repentance rituals were combined with mantic dicing. Buddhist variants of mantic knowledge are interwoven into the large Buddhist encyclopedias, such as Daoshi's 道世 (d. 683) *Fayuan zhulin*

14 Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, 257–58.

15 *Chang ahan jing*, T. 1, 1:54b9–13. There are other enumerations resembling that provided, like a fivefold structure more prevalent in Southern Buddhism, or abhidharmic enumerations of ten kinds of power. They are all typically developed by practitioners who have made considerable spiritual progress.

16 See Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk*, 71.

17 Guggenmos, "Qian Divination."

法苑珠林 (A grove of pearls in the garden of the dharma) or his *Zhujing yaoji* 諸經要集 (Essentials of the sūtras). In the *Fayuan zhulin*, separate chapters are preserved on the interpretation of dreams and appearances, respectively, but also on rituals for influencing rainfall. Mantic arts are rarely conceptualized as a separate category in the organization of knowledge. They appear integrated into larger narrative contexts and are the moment that causes common amazement in miracle stories (*shen yi* 神異).¹⁸ These narrations have been preserved in the context of biographical writings. As historiographical documents, biographies of eminent monks bear witness to the role of monks as advisors to the ruler, competing at court with other mantic specialists.

Outstanding in its social recognition is the art of dealing with the *Yijing* 易經 (*Book of Changes*). Closely linked to scholarly traditions, it shows that a preoccupation with the practices of prediction was by no means limited to the lower social classes, but was practiced across all social strata. The *Book of Changes*, as one of the Confucian classics, illustrates in an exemplary way, in its commentarial literature, the smooth transition between divination and a literary genre concentrated on a rich exploration of the horizon of action. The intellectual examination of this classic naturally forms part of the Buddhist tradition and has been repeatedly addressed by Chinese Buddhist scholars. While, in most instances, we know little about how they engaged with the *Book of Changes*, one exception is at hand: in the late Ming dynasty, the well-known Buddhist Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599–1655) wrote a commentary on the *Yijing*, the *Zhouyi chanjie* 周易禪解 (A Chan interpretation of the *Zhou Changes*).¹⁹

Determining the right time to perform rituals is essential to esoteric Buddhism, a form of Buddhist traditions that transmit central teachings via exclusive master-disciple relationships. The proper timing, in this context, required astrological knowledge. Astrology, therefore, was already an integral part of esoteric Buddhism in India. With the spread of esoteric Buddhism in China from the mid-eighth century onward, classics of Buddhist astrology, such as the standard work *Xiuyao jing* 宿曜經 (Scripture of constellations and luminaries), translated by Amoghavajra, became available and Indian astrology became known in China. While, in China, hemerology – determining personal fate and auspicious dates for certain undertakings – was traditionally based on calendric table calculations, often involving the date of birth of the client, astrology was an eminently courtly matter in Chinese eyes: its

18 Guggenmos, “Convinced by Amazement.”

19 Beverley Foulks McGuire is currently writing a contribution on Buddhist interpretations of the *Yijing* for the *Divination in Chinese Religions*. See Pregadio, Clart, and Schumann, ed., *Handbook of Chinese Divination*. See also Lo, “Change beyond Syncretism.”

importance resulted from the ruler's role as the "Son of Heaven" (*tianzi* 天子) who, as a mediator between heaven and earth, was responsible for the welfare of the empire. In this way, events in the sky had direct earthly consequences. The introduction of Indian astrology with the advent of esoteric Buddhism in Medieval China was destined to receive attention, especially as it facilitated not only the proper timing of rituals, but also personal fate counselling. In the Japanese Buddhist traditions, like Tendai and Shingon, this esoteric astrological knowledge was incorporated as part of the esoteric tradition. Esoteric Buddhism in China faded away, but remained in practice in Japan, through which Buddhist astrological knowledge survived in Japan. Academic Buddhist studies in Japan, therefore, are the first reference regarding in-depth knowledge about Buddhist esoteric astrology.²⁰

Looking beyond China at the adjoining regions, it is alongside Mongolian, especially Tibetan, Buddhism that divination is far less questioned, but has been and continues to be part of daily Buddhist life.²¹ Just as healers are consulted in the case of illness, diviners are consulted regarding questions about the future. Signs should be interpreted as well as they demand the complex skills of the interpreting diviner to uncover the hidden knowledge. Divination can be based on a dream, vision, or prophecy, independent of its material basis. An inanimate or animate object can directly serve as a medium of the message or raise attention through its expression in certain forms, just like visions that occur on surfaces like mirrors, on the water surface of a lake, in the

20 Chinese and Indian astrology merged in medieval China during a complex process. The development of Buddhist astrology culminated in Tang dynasty Esoteric Buddhism, with the monks Yixing 一行 (683–727) and Amoghavajra (Bukong 不空, 705–774). The classics of Buddhist astrology were translated and handed down by them. Of particular note here: a) Yixing's *Xuyao yigui* 宿曜儀軌 (Ritual proceedings for worshipping the Asterisms), T. 1304, i.e. the 28 constellations along the ecliptic, and the Seven Luminous Bodies; b) his *Qiyao xingchen bie xingfa* 七曜星辰別行法 (Alternative method of practice [with regard to the] seven luminaries and asterisms), T. 1309; c) and Amoghavajra's aforementioned translation of a classic of Indian astrology, the *Xuyao jing* 宿曜經 (Scripture of constellations and luminaries), T. 1299, and his text on how to determine the time of the dangerous influences of the Seven Luminaries, *Qiyao rangzai jue* 七曜攘災決 (Cutting off and removing evil [caused by] the Seven Planets), T. 1308. On Buddhist astrology see Yano, *Mikkyō senseijutsu*; Morita, *Mikkyō senseihō*; Sørensen, "Astrology and the Worship of the Planets," 230–44; Sørensen, "Central Divinities"; and Kotyk, "Buddhist Astrology and Astral Magic." On the international dimensions of Chinese astrology, see Chang, "Translation and Adaption." For an introduction to Chinese esoteric Buddhism, see Goble, *Chinese Esoteric Buddhism*.

21 Indian Buddhist forms of divination lie beyond within the scope of this article. Recently, David Fiordalis has dealt with occurrences and legitimization arguments in Theravāda Buddhism. Fiordalis, "On Buddhism, Divination and the Worldly Arts."

sky, or in dreams. From a twinkling eye to a crow's cry, the competence of the diviner is required to distinguish irrelevant from significant signs. The divinatory techniques typically applied in the Tibetan context include scapulimancy, divination with rosaries, arrows, pebbles, dice or cords, and a technical calculation that extrapolates the past and present to the future of the client, called "Chinese divination". Knowledge about the future enables precautions to be taken through the performing of rituals or other practices.²²

5 Approach

With a tradition that is relatively cautious regarding divination and an academic interest in Buddhism motivated by Zen Buddhist inspirations and philosophical deliberations, it is unsurprising that we are at an early stage of research on Buddhist divination. Such research becomes even more challenging as certain divination texts are preserved in the Buddhist canon that are not distinctively Buddhist, but rather travel across Asia through Buddhist networks. The late Michel Strickmann, with his *Chinese Poetry and Prophecy*,²³ certainly laid a cornerstone by examining the spread of the written (temple) oracle across Asia within the Buddhho-Daoist spectrum of practices. Single mantic disciplines have attracted in-depth research, as in the case of astrology.

Still, it seems advisable to take a step back from our brief overview at this point and define exactly what it is that we seek. How should we approach a field that is emically hazy and doctrinally ambiguous? The recent research in the field of Buddhist and religious studies recenters the aesthetic, perceptive dimensions of religious life and systematically attempts to unearth the religion "beyond the book." The so-called "cultural turn" marks a general reorientation within cultural studies and the humanities²⁴ and is associated with an awareness that cultures and academia in both Europe and historically-related contexts display a strong bias toward textual sources and established theoretical

22 While a considerably neglected topic in academia, Tibetan divination has been the focus of the IKGf for the past few years. A documentary on cord divination (*ju thig*) by Tibetan Bon master Lopon Trinley Nyima Rinpoche can be found at <https://www.ikgf.fau.de/videos/documentaries/practice-of-divination-rinpoche.shtml>, accessed March 3, 2020. For an overview about Tibetan divination, see Maurer's preface to *Glimpses of Tibetan Divination*, by Petra H. Maurer, Donatella Rossi, and Rolf Scheuermann, viii–x. For an introduction to dice and *mālā* divination, see Sobisch and Nielsen, *Divining with Achi and Tārā*.

23 Strickmann, *Chinese Poetry and Prophecy*.

24 Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns*. See also Guggenmos, "Smell as Communication," and the other contributions in that volume.

concepts. These are applied to other contexts, often without further reflection, reorganizing social systems by describing them in terms of Western parameters, like searching for sacred books, or commenting on missing doctrinal coherence and unidentified membership status for phenomena identified as “religion”. Academia, with its claim to unbiased research, emerged along with a colonial endeavor. New approaches in cultural studies, therefore, attempt to transcend established analytical patterns and aim to produce closer, “thick” descriptions that reveal the peculiarities of a field of social interaction and pay attention to communication on a multisensory level. Such an approach allows for greater sensitivity, which might be of especial relevance to the question of divination. In the course of the twentieth century, the rise of technical knowledge and natural sciences was accompanied by a common notion that practicing divination and prognosticating the future were to be seen as superstitious, backward orientations that had become obsolete in “modern” societies. Sensitivity toward cultural biases helps to avoid projecting this notion back onto historical Buddhist sources by asking to what extent Buddhism has always been “modern” or by seeing the practice of divination as problematic over the centuries. It is also tempting to read into historical sources the dichotomy between “Buddhism” and “superstition,” while the field does not offer that issue as a persistent conflict. Developing an awareness of one’s own research questions is, therefore, the most obvious benefit of examining the so-called “cultural turn”. It delivers a richer, less biased picture of the Buddhist forms of divination and reveals how much we miss when we limit ourselves to asking with which arguments divination was legitimized or exactly how Buddhist astrology functioned.

Considering this broader horizon, the aim is to gain a deeper understanding of what divination meant, and continues to mean, to Buddhists. Which role did it play in their lives? What impact did it have on their decision-making and how did they experience it emotionally? Over the past few years, the author has worked with two kinds of historically-preserved sources that deliver insights in this respect, reflections on ritual practices of divination, and biographical material. In the following, I intend to introduce briefly the potential that associates with the first topic, and consecutively will elaborate on divination as it is reflected in Chinese Buddhist biographies. By doing so, I sum up parts of my research on the *Shenseng zhuan* 神僧傳 (Biographies of thaumaturge monks).²⁵

25 Guggenmos and Li, *Wahrsagende Mönche*.

6 Ritual Practices of Divination

One of the most common techniques of divination that spread all over Asia is posing a question and selecting via a randomizing method one answer from a set. While among other tools dice, oblong four-sided or six-sided ones, were in general more prevalent in South Asia for choosing those answers, sticks like bamboo slips were more common in East Asia for drawing lots.²⁶ The ritual is known as a habitual practice in popular religious temples in the Chinese-speaking cultural area today. It has been coined the “temple oracle” by Werner Banck,²⁷ but is also named *qian* 籤 divination according to the conventional character for the slips chosen during the selection process. Research on the Chinese canon revealed three different ritual texts that integrate the temple oracle:²⁸ the earliest preserved Chinese temple oracle, the *Guanding jing* 灌頂經 (Consecration sūtra, T. 1331) from the fifth century, is, in fact, not only Buddhist but replete with Buddhist teachings, aiming at the followers’ conversion. Unique seems also the integration of the temple oracle into a ritual repentance practice with the aim of karmic purification, preserved in the sixth-century *Zhancha shan’e yebao jing* 占察善惡業報經 (Sūtra on the divination of the effect of good and evil actions, T. 839, henceforth *Divination Sūtra*). Through throwing dice, one is involved in a spiritual process that shall lead to the overcoming of doubts and fears regarding one’s karmic burden, with the final aim being to transcend the need for divination itself. Slight Buddhist changes of the temple oracle can be found in nominal adaptations: In the thirteenth-century *Tianzhu lingqian* 天竺靈籤 (Efficacious slips of Tianzhu, the temple oracle can only be identified as Buddhist by the fact that its name is given a Buddhist attribute. This analysis of the Buddhist forms of temple oracles reveals nominal, doctrinal, and performative modes of adaptation and transmission that are also of interest in the broader context of understanding religious transmission across cultures. The challenge related to this material is that ritual instructions and booklets of answers rarely inform us directly about the usage of temple oracles or the impact the practice had on its consultants. The answers themselves occasionally shed light on questions relevant to the practitioners and the range of solutions connected to the temple oracles provides us with an indirect insight into their *Lebenswelt*. While the *Tianzhu*

26 For an extensive overview on the shape, inscribed numbers and letters of dice, the structure of the sets of answers, and probability distributions in Tibet, India and across Asia, see Dotson, “Three Dice, Four Faces, and Sixty-Four Combinations.”

27 Banck, *Das chinesische Tempeloralakel*.

28 Guggenmos, “*Qian* Divination.”

lingqian have come down to us as single leaflets, a few lines on the legitimization of mantic practices in the age of decay of the Buddhist teachings stand at the beginning of the *Consecration Sūtra*.²⁹ The *Divination Sūtra* describes how to craft the dice, how to prepare the environment, and the motivation for its practice like the overcoming of doubt in the age of the *semblance dharma*, as well as providing instructions on how to deal with certain, often conflicting results. By doing so, it enriches the picture of the emotional landscape that surrounds its practice.

The *Divination Sūtra* stands out, as we can trace its practice spuriously but repeatedly within East Asia over the centuries to date. Distinctive is the case of the scholar monk Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599–1655) of whom not only a manual and a commentary on the *Divination Sūtra* are preserved, but whose disciples also noted down personal memories that their master shared with them. Through these, Ouyi's life unfolds as a struggle to overcome adversity. Experiencing the death of close relatives and friends as well as serious illness, Ouyi repeatedly checked his karmic situation with the help of the *Divination Sūtra* and, in consequence, even handed back his monastic precepts. The *Divination Sūtra* serves, for Ouyi, as a way to handle emotions, overcome doubts and set out on a spiritual path. Beverley McGuire comments:

29 The *Consecration Sūtra* as well as the *Divination Sūtra* are two ritual texts that deliver the prevailing argument for practicing divination, despite the fact that this is generally discouraged – an argument that is based on a perception of history in ages of increasing decay. The concept of “ages”/“aeons” (*kalpa*) is already present in Indian Buddhism: Vasubandhu, the co-founder of the Yogācāra school, speaks in *Abhidharmakośa* of four aeons, (1) the destruction of the universe, (2) the duration of the destruction, (3) the time during which the world slowly returns, and (4) the time when the world is restored. In the third age, there are periods of progress and decline. Currently, the world would be in decline. Human life has been shortened from 80,000 years and will fall further, to a ten year life span, due to hunger, disease, and war. This phase is accompanied by spiritual degeneration, because the natural sense of morality has vanished. See La Vallée Poussin, *L'Abhidharmakośa de Vasubandhu*, 181–88. The slow decline occurs in three phases which, in the Mahāyāna Buddhist context of fifth and sixth century East Asia, circulated widely: (a) the time of the true teaching (*zhengfa* 正法), which – depending on the source – lasts for 500 or 1,000 years, during which people come to realize and implement the Buddhist teaching; (b) the time of the “semblance dharma” (*xianqfa* 像法), a period of 500 or 1,000 years, which is influenced by Buddhist practice outwardly, but in which real awakening does not occur and (c) the time of the “final dharma” (*mofa* 末法), which is uniformly said to last 10,000 years. Buddhist practice has disappeared, and only the teaching remains. Awakening is no longer possible. For a detailed investigation of the concept and the different development paths of Indian and Chinese Buddhism, see Nattier, *Once upon a Future Time*. For further details on this concept, see Guggenmos and Li, *Wahrsagende Mönche*, 40–41.

Ouyi Zhixu's [...] suggests that emotions of shame, faith, and sincerity play crucial roles in moral and religious transformation, which occurs within the practitioner's 'heart-mind' during rituals, and he sees emotions and material objects as means of uncovering suchness or reality-as-it-is. [...] Divination provides a means of addressing fear of karmic retribution and doubt about one's ability to overcome karmic obstacles. As we have seen in Ouyi's own case, these can pose substantial hindrances for one's religious development. By counteracting the deleterious effects of such emotions, divination enables practitioners to have confidence in their ability to spiritually progress. In this way, divination provides a means of regulating emotions and reshaping religious outlooks.³⁰

As a late Ming dynasty scholar, Ouyi devotes himself wholeheartedly to his divinatory practice and withdraws from society to remain in solitude during this process. In my recent research on translating the *sūtra*, situating it in its historical context, and writing its cultural history, I conducted repeated field research trips to Shandong and Taiwan to visit *Divination Sūtra* practitioners. While my research is still in progress, one characteristic of the current practitioners is striking: Ouyi and also single twentieth century practitioners are seriously concerned about their individual karmic obstacles. In contrast, the contemporary practice of the *Divination Sūtra* appears to have transformed. The concern about karmic purity and nagging necessity to learn about one's karma in order to determine the intensity and amount of repentance dominated the emergence of the *sūtra* in the sixth century and inspires practitioners like Ouyi Zhixu. In contemporary Chinese-speaking areas, this ritual can be witnessed as integrated into a group practice that aims to create space for discussing the complexities of daily decision-making. My initial results suggest that this might indicate a major shift in contemporary capitalistic societies, based on how emotions are processed. Eva Illouz describes the changing role of emotions in a consumer-oriented society through the rise of "emodities"³¹ – emotions become short-lived market products that are equipped with the notion of being essential to the fulfillment of one's life as dominated by emotional projects. While an in-depth examination of the cultural history of the *Divination Sūtra* lies beyond the scope of this article, this brief excursion shows that Buddhist rituals and divination practices are deeply enmeshed in the management of emotions and how historical developments impact on the role that divination plays in the handling of emotions.

30 McGuire, "Seeing Suchness," 265–66.

31 Illouz, *Emotions as Commodities*.

7 Biographical Material

A major source that shapes our understanding of Chinese Buddhist history is biographical collections such as the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (GSZ, Biographies of eminent monks),³² *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (XGSZ, Continued biographies of eminent monks),³³ *Song gaoseng zhuan* (SGSZ),³⁴ or *Ming gaoseng zhuan* 明高僧傳 (MGSZ, Ming Dynasty biographies of eminent monks).³⁵ Of special note among these collections is the *Shenseng zhuan*. In 1417, the Yongle Emperor (r. 1403–1424), third emperor of the Ming Dynasty, commanded their compilation. The 208 biographies represent a selection from the first three of the aforementioned large-scale Buddhist biographical text corpora, the GSZ up to the SGSZ, but also include a wide range of other material, from secular political sources to episodes extracted from miracle tales, such as *zhiguai* 志怪 narrations. According to the preface, which was written by the emperor, the biographies were selected with the intention to provide easy access to material that was otherwise hidden among the mass of biographies that would serve as proof or evidence (*zheng* 徵) of the power of Buddhism. Buddhism, the emperor explains, is convincing because of the extraordinary ability of certain outstanding monks, whom he describes as being endowed with “supernatural,” “divine” (*shen* 神) power. Particularly in the *Shenseng zhuan*, but also in the large-scale biographical corpora, mantic practices are among the natural actions of Chinese Buddhist monks. With regard to the GSZ and the XGSZ, Anderl and Yang speak of predictions as a “natural ‘by-product’ of eminent monastics’ outstanding virtue and insight”.³⁶ In the following, I will provide an overview of the mantic activities that we find among monks in the *Shenseng zhuan*.³⁷ How do they deliver insights into the life-world of Buddhist divination

32 T. 2059, probably compiled around 530 A.D. by the monk Huijiao 慧皎, 497–554, collects 257 biographies from early times up to around the date of compilation.

33 T. 2060, compiled by 道宣, 596–667, and completed in 645, contains 500 biographies of the GSZ up to the compilation date.

34 T. 2061 contains a total of 666 biographies, following on from the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* and covering the period up to the Song dynasty, 960–1279.

35 T. 2062, compiled in 1617 A.D. by the monk Ruxing 如惺, contains 180 biographies in total.

36 Yang and Anderl, “Chinese Buddhist Historical Texts,” 28–29.

37 The *Gaoseng zhuan* and other biographical collections deliver an even broader array of prognostications and mantic techniques. A rich collection and first theoretical reflection of the relevant passages in the *Gaoseng zhuan* and *Xu gaoseng zhuan* can be found in Yang and Anderl, “Chinese Buddhist Historical Texts,” 1–45, and Yang, “Zhonggu shiqi hanchuan Fojiao.” Covering a collection like the GSZ or the XGSZ is challenging due to the complexity of the historiographical material and also because a comprehensive reading of the *Gaoseng zhuan* as a whole remains a *desideratum* to date. As I have worked with

and in which social contexts does divination occur? What role do mantic arts play in the narrations and which topics are dealt with by divination?

The biographies in the *ssz* offer a great variety of narrations: the spectrum ranges from biographies of assimilated, respected Confucians, whose predictive abilities form part of their comprehensive classical education, to biographies of hermits and social outcasts. Narrated as being close to insane, these diviners can utter a coded statement, the message of which is revealed in retrospect during the narration only and functions as a structuring device.

8 The Notion of Karma – The Case of An Shigao

The majority of the biographies of divining monks in the *Shenseng zhuan* depict them as equipped with a comprehensive knowledge that ranges over the past, present and future. The temporal aspects merge together, due to the underlying operating concept of karmic retribution. In search for the practice of mantic techniques, the first reading experience of these biographies can, therefore, be puzzling. We rarely see monks receiving training in a specific mantic technique. Their predictions can create the impression of the arbitrary application of such techniques up to direct prophecies about the future without further technical aids. At the same time, the power of the monks seems limited by the power of fate. In particular, neither their own nor a client's predestined death can be significantly influenced by them, but needs proper preparation or the concealment of such sensitive foreknowledge.

The operations of karma across rebirth are the compositional principle in the biography of An Shigao 安世高.³⁸ Employing the extant material to reconstruct the biography of An Shigao as a historical person has entailed in-depth research.³⁹ An Shigao is considered the earliest translator of Buddhist texts into Chinese. A monk of Parthian origin, he probably arrived in Luoyang 洛陽 in 147/148 AD and was active as a translator at the court of Emperor Huan 桓

Li Wei since 2011 on the material of the *Shenseng zhuan*, in the following, I will restrict myself to analyzing this compilation. Therefore, from this point onward, quotations of and references to the *Shenseng zhuan* in the main text are given by the page number only.

38 Brief introductions to all of the monks mentioned in the following can be found in Guggenmos and Li, *Wahrsagende Mönche*, 265–72. The full translations of all biographies according to the *Shenseng zhuan* form part of Guggenmos and Li, *Wahrsagende Mönche*.

39 Zacchetti, “An Shigao,” 630–41.

(r. 147–168). His biography in the *Shenseng zhuan* integrates a probably legendary journey to southern China and includes several rebirths.⁴⁰

In the case of An Shigao, karma and rebirth-related statements guide his actions. In the narration, he knows that he was a monk in his last life, which information makes it possible for the reader to link the two lives together. In the following, An Shigao is shown analyzing the capacity of a fellow student – he has insight into sūtras, but an effervescent character. An Shigao reasons that therefore his rebirth will be of ugly shape, which he combines with the will to help his fellow student in his spiritual progress in the next life. Later, An Shigao frees his former peer, now reborn as a snake god, by enabling him to gain merit through building a temple and thus move on to a better rebirth, leaving behind his current corpse. With regard to his own life, An Shigao explains his change of location and what happens to him as based on the motive to repay his karmic debts. In doing so, he avoids managing his harmful karma through engaging in ritual or prayer, but deliberately allows himself be killed by a boy to whom he explains beforehand: “My karmic debt is weighing heavily on you. I have come a long way to make up for it. Your anger results from your last life.” (我宿命負卿遠來相償。卿之忿怒故是前世時意也。)⁴¹ Three times in the narration, An Shigao recognizes karmic debts. The announcement that he must visit a certain place to compensate for his or others’ karmic guilt is marked each time by the modal verb *dang* 當 (must, shall). This balancing of karma is the driving force and structures the narrative. Karmic knowledge grounds An Shigao’s social recognition. People who lack An Shigao’s karmic knowledge of the future react with emotional consternation, amazement, and horror.⁴²

What are the characteristics of this foreknowledge? In none of his predictions does An Shigao describe future events in detail but he simply states his next step or gives his colleague a general outlook on the future. His knowledge about future events results from a comprehensive understanding of the effects of karma so it may be the quality of this background knowledge of karmic effects that renders the learning of a concrete mantic technique almost superfluous. Karmic entanglements are so prevalent in the story that one even can re-read the whole narration in this light: at an early stage of the narration, An

40 *Shenseng zhuan*, T. 2064, L:948c26–949b18. This biography is translated and commented upon in Guggenmos and Li, *Wahrsagende Mönche*, 43–56, 228–30, 234–36.

41 *Shenseng zhuan*, 949a12–13. With “*suming* 宿命,” karma resulting from past lives is addressed; i.e., An Shigao’s claim that, in his past life, he acquired guilt regarding another person.

42 These instances of surprise and emotional agitation among the audience are narrated as moments that convince people of the power of Buddhism and create belief. See Guggenmos, “Convinced by Amazement.”

Shigao explains to the boy that this is happening due to evil karma before the boy chops off An Shigao's head. Impressed by the event, the boy, as a witness of karma, starts to spread the teachings of cause and effect. Becoming a distributor of karmic knowledge, he grows up and, toward the end of the narration, accompanies An Shigao's rebirth for another repay of debt. Therefore, laying aside the fact that this text forms part of a biographical collection and is dedicated to An Shigao, one can read the whole biography as a statement of the workings of cause and effect in the form of a transformation story of a young boy who beheads An Shigao in order to become a distributor of Buddhism.⁴³ In this context, the question does not arise of whether An Shigao sees himself as a fortune-teller or which technique he claims to have mastered. Central is his understanding of the Buddhist basic concept of the workings of karma. He does not have to learn a fortune-telling technique but can, if necessary, spontaneously apply a particular technique. His understanding of reality encompasses the past, present, and future. This includes the fact that nature becomes a message to him; for example, through the call of birds, whose language he understands.

In other biographies of the *Shenseng zhuan*, the extraordinary knowledge of monks is less focused on the workings of karma, but includes knowledge of current distant events like a person falling ill or hidden items. These abilities are also consistent with two of the six forms of Buddhist supernatural knowledge described above: that of "celestial hearing" (*tian'er tong* 天耳通) and the power to understand others' state of mind (*zhi taxin tong* 知他心通). The extraordinary knowledge can include the past as well, such as knowing how a building was built and telling somebody his past rebirth outright.⁴⁴

The technology-free prediction of the future does not occur only with An Shigao. The spontaneous appearance of future knowledge, that expresses itself through predictions, is the norm rather than the exception in the biographies. Monks like Wanhui 萬迴 (d. 710–712) combine their answers with caressing the questioner over their back (*Shenseng zhuan*, T. 2064, L:993c19ff., 27ff.), while others answer by writing down verses (Huaijun 懷濬, end of 9th cent., 1009c7ff.). Future events are communicated as a retrievable knowledge in the narrations. It also happens that the monks help to shape the client's future:

43 This might, in fact, be close to the intention of the composition. One should bear in mind that biographies as a genre of Chinese Buddhist writing are considered historical documents that see it as a form of historicity to assemble extant sources without alteration, but link them loosely by making slight amendments. See Guggenmos and Li, *Wahrsagende Mönche*, 4–5.

44 This is especially true in the case of the monk Qi Yu. For this and further examples, see Guggenmos and Li, *Wahrsagende Mönche*, 234.

the monk Mingda, a social outcast, predicts the future of an aspirant official by forcing him to gallop around widely, which reflects his future position of broad influence (998a16–17). Others who refuse to be helped suffer the consequences, even to the point of death.

9 Mantic Arts as Part of the Established Canon of Knowledge

Beyond the narrative concept in An Shigao's biography, its opening sheds light on how mantic arts were integrated into the larger organization of knowledge and reconfirms the lack of an emic separate category of knowledge. In general, the beginning of the biographies often contain enumerations of the outstanding abilities and training of monks. Here, mantic expert knowledge mingles among other forms of knowledge. An Shigao's biography opens with an exemplary portrayal of the intelligent, reverent and fully-educated young prince who, among other things, masters arts that deliver knowledge about the future: "Neither among the foreign classics and records, nor among the Seven Luminaries, the Five Phases, the medical arts, the obscure arts, up to the sound of birds and tetrapods, was there anything that he did not master." (外國典籍及七曜五行醫方異術乃至鳥獸之聲無不綜達。)⁴⁵ The astrological arts addressed by the Seven Luminaries clearly refer to the future; the Five Phases are also, but not exclusively, applicable to the future; medicine refers to the future through the intention of healing; the "obscure arts" have partial relevance to the future, and the sounds of animals can both provide information about events that are happening at a distance and also, as in the present case, herald the future. Knowledge about the future is, therefore, an important aspect of established knowledge, but by no means described as a clearly defined category in the text itself.

At the same time, a historicizing approach delivers further insight into mantic arts and the organization of knowledge: the oldest version of the arts mastered by An Shigao can be found in a preface written by another famous monk, Kang Senghui, to a text traditionally attributed to An Shigao, the *Anban shouyi jing* 安般守意經 (Sūtra on the technique of the Ānāpānasmṛti).⁴⁶ This text spread widely when Buddhism emerged in China and its preface contains the earliest biographical note on An Shigao's life:

45 *Gaoseng zhuan*, T. 2059, L:948c28–29.

46 *Ānāpānasmṛti* is a term referring to mindfulness when breathing in and out. Zacchetti doubts An Shigao's authorship of the *Anban shouyi jing*. See Zacchetti, "A 'New' Early Chinese Buddhist Commentary."

There was a Bodhisattva named Anqing; his adult name was Shigao. He was the son of the main wife of the King of Parthia. He abdicated the throne and galloped away from his country with his uncle. Moving away, he finally came to live in the capital. This is the kind of person he was: he studied hard and possessed a broad knowledge. He was able to touch miraculously with his hand, [understood] the growth and decline of the seven luminaries, and [could] predict fortune and misfortune with the help of Fengqi, landslides and earthquakes, and acupuncture – all of these arts [he mastered]. [He could] recognize illnesses by means of physiognomy [and knew] how to interpret the call of birds and quadrupeds – without sound, this was impossible [literally: without sound no understanding]. In his heart, he nurtured two basic powers [i.e. *yin* and *yang* or heaven and earth]. He had compassion for the stupidity of the common people. First, he held on to his ears, then he opened his eyes. In this respect, he saw clearly and listened with wisdom. Thus, he gradually explained the six true ways and translated the secrets of Ānāpāna.

有菩薩名安清字世高。安息王嫡后之子。讓國與叔馳 避本土。翔而後集遂處京師。其為人也。博學多識。貫綜神摸。七正盈縮。風氣吉凶。山崩地動。鍼脉諸術。覩色知病。鳥獸鳴啼無音不照。懷二儀之弘。仁愍黎庶之頑闇。先挑其耳却啟其目。欲之視明聽聰也。徐乃陳演正真 之六度。譯安般之祕奧。⁴⁷

In this passage, the person himself stands central and the disciplinary knowledge that prevails in the historically later enumerations is out of focus. This text might include an early form of the art of *mogu* 摸骨, in which one extrapolates the future course of someone's life by touching the body and gaining knowledge of its bone structure and shape. The word *fengqi* refers to a fortune-telling technique, which appears during the Han dynasty under the term *fengjiao* 風角. This technique predicts the future using five tones and the winds of the four directions. The medical arts refer to the recognition of diseases by means of physiognomy. Also, the understanding of animals' language is presented in more detail. This enumeration appears to be less standardized. The presentation focuses on the person of An Shigao, who has an ear for the needs of all who seek advice, and who not only passes on his knowledge but combines it with Buddhist wisdom. An Shigao leads the people on the "six ways" to Nirvāṇa. Written around the end of the Han period, this text appears to be less canonically transformed and closer to an actual description of a living knowledge

47 *Anban shouyi jing*, T. 602, xv:163b21ff.

that was spread during the Han period. Through making a comparison of this nature, one might gain an impression of the strong standardization process that biographical material underwent and how deeply mantic arts might have been woven into the spectrum of monks' interactions with the public during the early spread of Buddhism in China.

10 Predicting Death

One recurring trope in the narrations underscores the eminency of Buddhist monks. Although they are rarely able to influence the time of their death, they might be able to foresee it. Several monks calculate and/or determine their own time of death. Fotiao, a monk in fourth century China, whose biography one can assume to be shaped by legends, "determined the day on which he would die" (調後自剋將亡之日。)⁴⁸ and, in consequence, delivers a final speech to the gathering crowd and prepares for his subsequent death. One must assume that early biographies as well as those of famous monks shape the expectations of the audience and readership. Among others, the famous Vajrabodhi (671–741), who brought esoteric Buddhism to China, announces his death as a karmic necessity and frames it ritually (997a11ff.). Few biographies diverge from this pattern. Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (344–413), the fourth century monk who standardized the Chinese Buddhist vocabulary, struggles with his translation skills even at the point of death and tries unsuccessfully to postpone his passing, but makes the *post mortem* behavior of his corpse proof of the accuracy of his translations (958a24ff.).

While the knowledge of one's death enables to prepare oneself, the miraculous (*shen* 神) power of the monks is limited especially regarding the alteration of fate (*ming* 命). Fotudeng 佛圖澄, a well-known Kuchan wonderworker in the fourth century, is quoted in the biographies as elaborating on this general concept:

To leave life and embrace death is the abiding principle of the Path. Whether a person's life is long or short is predetermined and [this life] is nothing that can be prolonged. Now, the Way means to emphasize perfect conduct, while virtue means to praise tirelessness. If one has fulfilled one's [karmic] obligations without reproach, then, although one dies, it is as if one were living. Going against [this] and prolonging [my life] is not my desire.

48 *Shenseng zhuan*, 954b9.

出入生死道之常也。修短分定非所能延矣。夫道重行全德貴無怠。苟業操無虧雖亡若在。違而獲延非其所願。⁴⁹

At the end of his life, Fotudeng argues that one's lifespan cannot be influenced and that this would conflict with conscientious Buddhist practice, which must rather be oriented toward spiritual development. He also adopts this deterministic position with regard to other persons and events, such as advising rulers on military affairs based on the predestined lifespan of states (953a12).

11 Encryptions

Predictions of death and fate, if they do not concern him, and especially if made in the context of the court, can be relatively sensitive issues for the divining monk. It is unsurprising that, in the biographies, negative predictions are often presented in code. Characteristically, they become comprehensible in retrospect. In this sense, they structure the narration and serve as a means to underscore the deserved respect.

"Thorny bushes" allude to rebels and the extermination of the ruling family (Fotudeng, 953c25–27); "bamboo sticks" indicate an imminent funeral (Mingda 明達, 998a11ff.); a predicted good future with a "sudden ending" is a metaphor for passing a civil service examination and a subsequent sudden death (Weiyang 惟瑛, 1006c4ff.); and a horse's head on the streets is understood as an adoration to successful defense (Huaijun 懷濬, 1009c20ff.). Prophecies can also be tragically misunderstood. In light of the prediction that the third son would chop off their heads, Empress Wei and a princess mistakenly kill someone, but are finally executed by Emperor Xuanzong, who was a third son, but not theirs (Wanhui, 993c16ff.). Future knowledge can remain hidden or be revealed to disciples (and the audience) alone. Fotudeng, during a conversation with the ruler, deliberately misinterprets the message of bells as being addressed to himself rather than the ruler (Fotudeng, 953b13ff.) and Vajrabodhi fails to pass on his knowledge about the imminent death of a princess, revealing this to his disciples alone (Vajrabodhi 金剛智, 997a7).

The biographies are to be understood as complex compositions, narratively refined with sensitivity to suit the flow of the audience's expectations. At the same time, they bear witness to the need for pragmatic considerations and the necessity for monks to consider the impact that their foreknowledge, once communicated, will make on their environment.

49 *Shenseng zhuan*, 953c13–16.

12 Social Contexts

It is, therefore, worth examining the social contexts in which we find monks serving a prophesying function. The majority of monks are portrayed at court. This is reasonable, as the Buddhist biographical collections were assembled in this context with the goal of helping Buddhism to gain state recognition. Already, the foundation of Buddhism in China is narrated in a courtly environment: court astronomers and other outstanding officials interpret the emperor's dream, a key narration and shared point of reference throughout the Chinese Buddhist tradition (here 948b24ff.). Buddhist monks join the ranks of these officials and do not limit their activities at court to divination.

The continuum oscillates between divination, consultation, the passing on of knowledge, exchanges on Buddhist topics, and other forms of social interaction; for example, Fotudeng seeks to correct the ruler's attitude and opens up new perspectives during his counselling when he advises the ruler not to apply punishments himself and to act with moderation (8952b29ff.). When the ruler doubts the practical benefit of Buddhism, Fotudeng directs attention to his advantageous rebirth, which would result from his conversion to Buddhism (952c7ff.). Fotudeng converses with him about whether a Buddhist ruler may carry out the death penalty, and affirms this (952c16ff.). He admonishes the ruler that Buddhist worship alone will not help, only a Buddhist way of life; otherwise, a violent death is imminent (952c24ff.). He interprets a turtle as an omen of an imminent invasion (953a13ff.) and foresees the downfall of the ruling house based on the sound of a bell, but encodes its message (953b10ff.). This enumeration illustrates how insights into future matters are essential for Buddhist counselling, but comprise merely one aspect of the broader instruction on good rulership.

In general, the advising of rulers takes place at court. Here, two subjects dominate, where monks shine: rainfall regulation and military policy. While rainfall is induced through rites and, therefore, cannot directly be counted as a mantic technique,⁵⁰ in the realm of military affairs, forecasting is of utmost importance in the courtly decision-making processes.

50 For an overview of rain rituals see Guggenmos and Li, *Wahrsagende Mönche*, 195–97, 242–43.

13 Military Counselling

Strategic and military advice can be found repeatedly in the biographies and is one of the main fields of counselling. Two long biographies, those of Fotudeng and Kumārajīva, consist of a dense series of reports on strategic advice.

Fotudeng grew into the role of military advisor throughout his career. First, the persecution and killing of monks motivated him to convince the responsible ruler, Shi Le 石勒 (274–333), of the value of Buddhism. He begins with miracles, such as allowing a lotus flower to grow from his begging bowl, and speaks to the ruler about the government. He heals illnesses, raises the alarm about approaching troops and is tested by Shi Le regarding his clairvoyant abilities. Fotudeng is then repeatedly consulted about the military situation and chances of success. He follows military operations spontaneously by reading signs from his palm. In the biographical narrative, Fotudeng is portrayed as someone who identifies strongly with the ruler whom he serves, giving him advice regarding concrete military situations based on the signs he receives. The loyalty of Fotudeng, rather than the ethical motivation of the ruler, is the main focus of the narration. These episodes conclude with repeated exhortations of Fotudeng for leniency and verification notes, which underline Fotudeng's Buddhist clairvoyant competence, that ranges over vast distances and time periods.

Kumārajīva's biography presents a picture of him having little choice but to place himself at the service of a series of rulers in an advisory capacity. His advice was offered during a period of intrigue and mutual conquests, which arose in China after the empire disintegrated following the Han dynasty. The fact that military and strategic questions are articulated with high density is, thus, also due to the historical setting. Kumārajīva is basically a captive of the respective local rulers. His advice always proves true, and he offers it without being asked. The spectrum of his advice is considerably broader than that of Fotudeng: he warns of an unfavorable resting place, mentions an ill-fated wind, and unmasks an incompetent healer. He interprets omens and diagnoses military opponents while playing chess with the ruler. A closer examination of three episodes from the story will shed light on the concrete behavior of Kumārajīva.

(1) In his early prediction to the ruler of Qiuci 龜茲 (contemporary Kucha, 957c4–12), Kumārajīva assumes the fated and, therefore, inevitable downfall of the country, which is why he advises submission. The fate of the country, *guoyun* 國運, thus cannot be averted. The ruler's failure to follow Kumārajīva's advice has drastic consequences, however, as the latter is deported. Kumārajīva,

however, shows no emotion, and advises the new commander equally. (2) The subsequent floods lead to the deaths of thousands of soldiers. Up to this point, Kumārajīva's fortune-telling power could be described as a highly developed sensitivity and ability to assess a given situation. (3) However, regarding a third piece of advice, which calls for a speedy return to Chang'an, the narrative mentions a concrete method: Kumārajīva advises a return on the basis of "averting fate by observing numbers" (*tuiyun kuishu* 推運揆數) which – although it is a *hapax legomenon* in the Buddhist canon – creates an impression that he was gaining insights into fate and the future based on calculations or extrapolations.

Kumārajīva continues his prophesying activity in changing contexts, always displaying the same loyalty to the respective ruler, even if the latter, as in the case of the former commander, is not explicitly interested in Buddhism. Kumārajīva also takes care regarding negative predictions: when he critically evaluates a campaign, he describes it as "not having seen its benefit" (957c21). In fact, only the commander escapes.

14 Candidates for Officialdom

Once one leaves the direct entourage of the ruler, a significant field for counselling that is directly linked to the court appears – that of tending to the concerns of aspiring officials. For centuries, individuals were exposed to a Confucian education by their families, for decades in some cases, based on a desire that they would become officials. A central sophisticated examination system regulated the entrance into state service. Hope and expectation, as well as fear and despair, were closely linked to the taking of these examinations, which led to the consultation of fortune-tellers.⁵¹ As we know from the *Tianzhu lingqian*, Buddhism clearly played a role in the counselling of aspiring officials – the leaflets often directly address the potential questions of this audience.⁵² Still, Buddhist monks rarely emerge in this role in the Buddhist biographies and the *Shenseng zhuan* constitutes an exception to this general impression: two monks, Hongdao 弘道 and Weiying, from the ninth century have biographical entries in the *Shenseng zhuan* (Biogr. 169:1005c4–1006a10;

51 The aforementioned *Tianzhu lingqian* provides a set of answers in which these clients are directly addressed; see Guggenmos, "Qian Divination," 43–70. For a vivid impression of the pressure that the candidates endured in Late Imperial China, see the chapter "Emotional Anxiety" in Elman's *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*, 295–370.

52 Guggenmos, "Qian Divination," 43–70.

Biogr. 171:1006b14–c11). Both of these biographies contain a specific prediction about an aspiring official that has proved true over the years, while the monk himself recedes into the background. Neither monk is identifiable as Buddhist by the content of their prediction or otherwise. Only their designation as *seng* 僧, a member of the Buddhist order, the *saṃgha*, makes them recognizable as Buddhists. A scan through the Buddhist canon shows that these texts only occur in the *Shenseng zhuan*, while the stories connected to them emerge in the *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (Extensive records of the Taiping Era, 976–983), which contains a wealth of stories from various periods of Chinese history and forms a kind of encyclopedia of supernatural events, that lived on in both literature and the theatre. It is pointless to speculate about the extent to which these two figures may have been practicing Buddhists. As they can be found in non-Buddhist works, the absence of Buddhist elements may be due not only to the persons themselves, but above all to the source. The *Shenseng zhuan* provides an image of Buddhism that might be held by an admiring outsider. At least, it does not reflect a longing for an orthodox, doctrinally-oriented Buddhism, but reflects an emphasis on prognostic reliability, that makes Buddhism indispensable in times of distress. This hints that the Buddhist monks may have been far more active in terms of divination than is reflected in the Buddhist canon.

15 Mantic Arts

One of the most intuitive questions, which one surely addresses to this corpus at the beginning, concerns which mantic arts the Buddhist monks mastered. In particular, one is inclined to ask which techniques were used, in which school's traditions one saw oneself, and how monks acquired these techniques. It may be due to the nature of biographies that we fail to obtain detailed answers to these questions. Biographies narrate from an observer perspective, that mentions certain techniques in order to raise a monk's reputation, which implies no intention to be instructive regarding a certain technique. Any description might even be perceived as an inappropriately invasive inquiry into the monk's competence.

In only one episode do we witness the transmission of an arithmetic method of fate calculation. Yixing 一行 (683–727) is a highly renowned monk who served under Emperor Xuanzong. He translated Buddhist texts, promoted esoteric Buddhism and was highly knowledgeable about astronomy. Known to future generations for his achievement in refining the Dayan calander in the year 727, his biography underlines this effort by describing a scene in which he learns the calculation methods for this purpose from a monk who “was

conducting [fate] calculation in the yard” (一行立於門屏間聞院中僧於庭布算。其聲蔌蔌。) – a technique recognizable by the sounds of clicking stalks, linked to the *Book of Changes*.⁵³

What can be traced beyond the simple mention of single techniques is how monks behave as experts on the major Chinese mantic traditions of astrology, dream interpretation, physiognomy, and the interpretation of omens.

16 Astrology

As noted above, astronomy, astrology and calendric calculations were of central importance at court for strengthening the political legitimacy of the emperor. By providing translations of Indian astronomical and astrological⁵⁴ scriptures, esoteric Buddhism made a major contribution to this eminent court subject and flourished itself.

Returning to Yixing, his biography illustrates his ability to manipulate movements in the sky and the subsequent reactions of the emperor through the ritual performance of actions that prefigured the celestial movements. Yixing deliberately induced a nationwide amnesty: he stated that seven animals would enter an abandoned garden and be captured. The pigs would be confined in an earthenware container, which is sealed with special mud used in Daoist alchemy and inscribed with Sanskrit words. Yixing's higher ritual knowledge is inaccessible to his followers, but is described as effective. Through his intervention, the Great Bear disappears from the sky – a stellar figure intensely worshipped in esoteric Buddhism, with its seven individual stars corresponding to deities and being ascribed power to determine the fate of the world.⁵⁵ The court historiographer recognizes this as an omen. In his position as advisor, Yixing has an opportunity to influence the actions of the court and interprets the event as a warning, drawing on the Chinese tradition and historical events. By applying the established astronomical-astrological patterns of argumentation, he switches to providing a solution by involving Buddhist ethics: goodness and mercy would improve the world and one should proclaim an

53 *Shenseng zhuan*, 995c9–10. See also Guggenmos and Li, *Wahrsagende Mönche*, 182–83.

54 The astronomy-astrology division is a modern dichotomy that cannot be applied uncritically to this historical situation. Therefore, these terms are used interchangeably in the following, with a tendency to ascribe as far as possible to the term astronomy a more technical, mathematical orientation. Still, it makes no sense to distinguish between astronomy and astrology when it comes to recording and interpreting celestial phenomena, where astronomical and astrological forms of knowledge flow into each other.

55 Guggenmos and Li, *Wahrsagende Mönche*, 186–87.

amnesty. The narrative thus offers an inseparable amalgam of astrological and Buddhist interpretations. This narration was probably written with the aim of demonstrating Yixing's power to change the celestial patterns and influence court politics. At the same time, Yixing intends to rescue a man from the death penalty, due to the gratitude that Yixing feels toward the man's elderly mother. A probably anachronistic reading of the story, bearing in mind the separation between state and private matters that is crucial to modern nation-building, would be that Yixing thus uses his power and courtly position to undermine the state and fulfil his personal relationship obligations. A less presumptuous interpretation might be to view this story as yet another demonstration of the power of Buddhism with esoteric Buddhist monks possessing a powerful and arcane knowledge going beyond the control of the Emperor and deserving his careful consideration.

The monk Fayuan 法願 (d. 499), mainly active as a physiognomist, also possesses detailed astronomical knowledge. He arrives at the court of Emperor Wen of (Liu-)Song (劉)宋文帝 (407–453) in the first half of the fifth century. When a rebellion breaks out in the south under the successor emperor (Emperor Xiaowu 孝武, r. 453–464), a prefect is sent to seek advice from Fayuan (969c12ff.). Fayuan interprets the events in astronomical-astrological terms: due to a previous killing by the prefect, an attack would occur that could be traced in the sky; the unjust death would have led to the star responsible for warlike conflict “attacking” the constellation of stars representing the south, which is why it would be illogical to continue the military attack. Here, an earthly event is linked to a stellar movement due to an unjust death. This, in turn, affects political events. The interpretation by Fayuan does not imply the concept that personal misdeeds have bad, astronomically-manifested consequences – one can see this as a Buddhist insight into karmic happenings, but it does not seem to be a special Buddhist competence. Fayuan shares with Yixing knowledge about the connection between the movements in the sky and earthly behavior, that is understood to be reliable and involves a concrete art of interpretation. In this art, Buddhist monks can be versed. Yixing skillfully weaves Buddhist wisdom into it, but this is far less evident in the case of Fayuan.

17 Dream Interpretation

The legitimizing power of dreams already features in the standard narrative of the beginning of Buddhism in China, mentioned above. The interpretation of dreams was practiced for centuries, and was well-established in Chinese

culture. The history of dream interpretation has received academic attention, especially regarding the Late Ming and Qing periods.⁵⁶ The *Shenseng zhuan* was compiled before the emergence of the Ming dynasty dream encyclopedias, like the *Mengzhan yizhi* 夢占逸旨 (Guidelines for dream divination) of 1562 or the *Menglin xuanjie* 夢林玄解 (Explication of the profundities in the forest of dreams) of 1636. These comprehensively list examples of successful dream interpretations that fall into three categories, including references to classical, well-known stories, direct messages, and surprising new ways to interpret Chinese characters.⁵⁷

During the Qing dynasty, the *Zhougong jiemeng* 周公解夢 (Dream explanation by the Duke of Zhou) was circulated widely. It may have originated during the Song dynasty as, since that time, we know that the Duke of Zhou was connected to expertise in dream interpretation.⁵⁸ Thus, at the time when the discussed biographies were compiled, the *Zhougong jiemeng* might already have been available in one of its many variations. Even if this were not the case, however, that dreams have meaning remains undisputed, as a synopsis of the dream interpretation narratives in historiography shows.⁵⁹ The initial traces can already be found in the *Book of Songs*, where dreaming of bears is seen as an auspicious sign for sons, with snakes as an auspicious sign for daughters. Dreams can be found in almost all classical literature and not even the most critical thinkers of the Han period, such as Wang Chong 王充 (27–ca. 97) or Wang Fu 王符 (ca. 82–167), question the meaning of dreams. Their interpretation is by no means uniform. Dream interpretations can be classified under different headings. For example, the Han dynasty critique Wang Fu, in his *Qianfu lun* 潛夫論 (Discourses of a recluse), distinguishes ten categories, including direct, symbolic, essential, thoughtful, or personal interpretations.⁶⁰ Concrete interpretations often take into account the social position and situation of the client. The same dream must be interpreted differently when experienced by different people. In Late Imperial China, sleeping in temples in order to experience dreams seems to have been popular⁶¹ – a variant that does not appear in the biographical narratives discussed here.

Dreams appear repeatedly in the biographies of the *Shenseng zhuan*. The monk Dao'an 道安 (312/4–385), a disciple of Fotudeng, famous as translator and as the compiler of one of the earliest catalogues of Buddhist scriptures, is concerned about the accuracy of his translations. In a dream, the Arhat Piṇḍola

56 Lackner, *Der chinesische Traumwald*; Vance, “Deciphering Dreams”; Vance, “Textualizing Dreams”; Smith, *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers*.

57 Smith, *Fortune-tellers*, 249.

58 Ibid.

59 Liu, “Die Traumdeutung im alten China,” 35–65.

60 Guggenmos and Li, *Wahrsagende Mönche*, 251.

61 Vance, “Deciphering Dreams,” 5–20.

assures him of the reliability of his work and asks him to make sacrifices – a statement to which the emerging ritual practice refers later for the purpose of legitimation (955a5ff.).⁶² A rich man has a dream in which his father tells him that the son's death is imminent and that he, therefore, shall seek counsel. The son then expects a person with a certain name to arrive who can provide information about the expected death (961a16ff.). Whether Buddhist or non-Buddhist, it seems to be a common assumption that, through dreams one can communicate with the past and future alike.

The interpretation of dreams in Buddhist contexts fits well with other mantic disciplines. Dream interpretation is linked to character interpretation and physiognomy. Fotudeng is called upon to interpret the dreams of the ruler Shi Hu 石虎, who dreamed of a herd of sheep carrying fish on their back. Fotudeng interprets this as referring to the Chinese character for the conqueror's name (Xian 鮮: sheep, with the fish radical; 953b5) and explains it as a bad omen, symbolizing that the main plain would be conquered. In fact, the capital of a rival ruling family is later built on that site. This analysis of signs (*chaizi* 拆字) also appears in the biographies, independently of dream interpretation.⁶³

Dream interpretation and physiognomy become intertwined in the biography of Wuquan 悟詮. Wuquan, probably alive in the fifth century, is – besides the entry in the *Shenseng zhuan* – known from non-Buddhist sources alone. In a dream, someone is asked to consult him as a physiognomist. The client's father appears, declaring that his son is about to die and seeking to consult the monk about this (961a17ff.). When Wuquan finally meets his client and the client consults him about his lifespan, Wuquan does not pursue physiognomy, but reverts to dream interpretation: he breathes on a glass full of water and predicts that the client will experience an auspicious dream that will provide him with an answer. In the subsequent dream, a purgatory in the form of a court scene appears, with one corridor for fortunate people and another for unfortunate ones. Happiness and long life, and thus metaphorically the path to the corridor for fortunate people, can be obtained by donating money to build bridges and paths. Thus, the client changes his behavior and the monk predicts that his life will be prolonged for ten years and that the next five generations of his descendants will prosper. In this narrative, the techniques of prediction flow seamlessly into each other and imply that a matter that began with a dream prediction must be resolved by messages conveyed via dreams.⁶⁴

62 Guggenmos and Li, *Wahrsagende Mönche*, 142.

63 For details on Dao'an's character dissection, see Guggenmos and Li, *Wahrsagende Mönche*, 140.

64 In his excellent PhD on dreams in the *Gaoseng zhuan* and *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, Jensen traces the development of the two works and stresses dreams as a “potent conceptual metaphor for the ‘betwixt and between’ experience of liminality”. See Jensen, “Dreaming

18 Physiognomy

External forms in various manifestations are attributed significance in Chinese culture. Whether it is the human body, the human face (physiognomy), or the landscape (Fengshui 風水), they all developed differentiated mantic disciplines and interpretative schemes, some of which became part of shared public knowledge.⁶⁵ The basic assumption that fate can be read from the external form and its correspondence to certain norms has already been explicitly proven during the Han period:

The teaching of forms and norms serves to outline the circumstances of the world on a large scale in order to build cities, walls, marketplaces, and houses; [it also serves to depict] the measure and number of the bone types of men and animals, and the shape and appearance of tools and items, in order to draw conclusions about their voices and pneuma and explore their status and fate.

形法者，大舉九州之勢以立城郭室舍形，人及六畜骨法之度數、器物之形容以求其聲氣貴賤吉凶。⁶⁶

Gumbrecht analyses physiognomy as a differentiated discipline that existed as early as the Han dynasty, with practitioners and clients of all social classes, from “on-call physiognomes” at court to the physiognome “for the common man”. Women also played these roles prominently.⁶⁷ Physiognomy featured in public life as a discipline, considering that, for example, in the context of population registration, young girls were systematically screened for their physiognomic fitness for the women’s chambers at the imperial court.⁶⁸ Individual predictions of the future, based on facial features, especially regarding official positions, were common, and Buddhist or Daoist monks helped the candidates to cope with the associated mental and emotional challenges. For the

Betwixt and Between,” iii. This complex topic lies beyond the scope of this article, which focuses on analysing the *Shenseng zhuan*.

65 The art of geomancy is less present in the *Shenseng zhuan*. Bruneton studied Korean monks who were well versed in geomancy, which he identifies as a special feature of Korean Buddhism. He ascribes to geomancy a mediatizing role between Buddhism and the state regarding, for example, Buddhist burials of politicians and the construction of monasteries and stūpas. See Bruneton, “Les moines géomanciens de Koryō.”

66 *Hanshu*, 30.1775 (“Yiwen zhi 藝文志”). Trsl. following Gumbrecht, “Die Physiognomie von vier Kaiserinnen,” 177; there 市 instead of 室.

67 Gumbrecht, “Die Physiognomie von vier Kaiserinnen,” 178–79, 180–82.

68 *Ibid.*, 171–214.

Ming Dynasty, Elman cites an example of a Buddhist monk who predicted the limited success of an aspirant to officialdom. In order to compensate for his physiognomic deficiencies, he would have to collect “hidden virtue” (*yinde* 陰德). The candidate then secretly feeds the fish in the lake with gold, despite his poverty. The next time they meet, the monk immediately recognizes the accumulated virtue and predicts that the candidate will pass the *jinshi* 進士 degree, the highest honor, the following year.⁶⁹

Whether physiognomic competence and Buddhist-ethical expertise can be combined so easily, even around a millenium earlier, can hardly be proven by the biography of Fayuan from the fifth century. Fayuan is described as being well-versed in the local culture. Only later, when he was already living in the palace, did he become a monk. However, he applied physiognomy to himself at a very early stage: a glance in the mirror tells him that he will see the emperor. The latter tests his physiognomic knowledge. It is difficult to assess the extent to which Fayuan combined physiognomy with Buddhism. Although he also has an entry in *Gaoseng zhuan*, the biography does not refer to any additional Buddhist characteristics apart from the Five Lay Commandments of Buddhism and Fayuan's late ordination. We have already noted Weiying's (ninth century) ability to predict the examination results of candidates on the basis of their voice and skin tone, but the conditions under which Weiying foresees success or failure in examinations are not directly linked to the candidates' physical features in the narrative.

Physiognomy is integrated into monks' behavior as a matter of course, although the narratives mainly reflect the results of the predictions, with concrete argumentation and technical foundations remaining in the background.

19 Omina

The interpretation of omina is one of the fields of divination at which monks excel. Established portents of omina, such as horses and dragons, appear in the biographies. The destruction of the Temple of the White Horse is prevented by the interpretation of a white, neighing horse circling the temple – which explains the aetiology of the temple's name (948c4ff.). When a monstrous, burned horse appears in the capital and suddenly flees, Fotudeng can interpret this as an approaching disaster (953b10). Kumārajīva proves his ability by interpreting the omen of an appearing dragon in combination with a three-headed

69 Elman, *A Cultural History*, 304–05. For a short note on the *jinshi* degree, see Guggenmos and Li, *Wahrsagende Mönche*, 209.

piglet as inauspicious: the ruler should prepare himself by cultivating his virtue. The latter fails to heed this advice, since he initially interpreted the appearance of the dragon as a positive sign.

During the forced relocation of Kumārajīva to the capital, Chang'an, auspicious omina appear on the conquering side, announcing the advent of the master: in a temple, the branches of two trees intertwine and, in a garden, ordinary onions become angelica (958a14ff.). The intertwining of the branches of two trees is already documented for the Han period as a lucky omen that could symbolize the virtue of the ruler or unity and love.⁷⁰ Frequently, omina must be interpreted by monks, but omina can also signal the auspicious presence of the Buddhist teachings or a monk. They form a natural element of the described everyday world and the art of their interpretation is the aspect to which attention is paid. Monks like Kumārajīva gain their authority through their ability to reinterpret established omina in complex contexts and thus demonstrate the strength of Buddhism, which they represent.

The geographical background of the monk's origin is relevant in an early narration: an Indian is ascribed competency in interpreting an omen as a sign of the development of the world's eras: in the legend-like biography of Falan 法蘭, the companion of the earliest Indian monk who arrived in China in the first century, an imperial advisor is asked to interpret the black ashes that have been excavated during a building project of the emperor but refers to the expertise of an "Indian from the western regions." Thus, Falan is confronted with this question and answers with an Indian concept of world ages, which assumes that the fire of the corresponding current age burns strongly and accordingly leaves behind ashes (948c21). Two centuries later, the biographies record how Kang Senghui 康僧會, traditionally seen as the founder of Buddhism in southeast China, speaks with great conviction of the kalpa fire as a strong force which, however, could not harm the Buddhist relic (949c15ff.).

20 Fortune-Telling Monks?

The attempt to separate different areas of divination makes it obvious that mantic techniques are interconnected and flow into each other. Omina are combined with dreams, dreams with physiognomy, and omina with astrological events.

Just as mantic arts develop creativity through their overlapping, they cannot be sharply distinguished from the monks' ability to work miracles, i.e. to

⁷⁰ Lippiello, *Auspicious Omens and Miracles*, 111–12.

perform actions that transcend the audience's horizon of expectation. In these miracles, the strength of Buddhist teaching is intended to be particularly evident. Therefore, numerous forms of miracles occur, in which relics, sūtras, or the bodies of respected monks prove indestructible. Likewise, the power of Buddhism is demonstrated through the control of disease. The supernatural abilities of the monks manifest themselves in the submissive gestures of animals toward them, and their capacity to travel huge distances instantly and practice multi-location.

The biographies present a colorful amalgam, in which the major contexts of Chinese divination are represented: dream interpretation, physiognomy, astrology, the interpretation of omens, predictions based on the analysis of characters, non-technical direct predictions of the future, more rare references to the *Book of Changes* – material can be found for all these aspects. Following the logic of the narration, the mantic activities form part of a broad field of action of what causes common amazement. In addition to future-oriented statements, this also includes events perceived as miracles that contradict the expected course of action, like anecdotes intended to confirm the power of Buddhism through the healing of diseases.

Monks are represented in a variety of social contexts, but are particularly present at the centers of political power. They advise rulers, especially on military matters, or ritually help to regulate precipitation. Aspirants to civil service seek advice from them regarding whether and how they will pass the state examinations. Outside the court, the monks find themselves as part of society, predicting social disorder and personal fortune. Occasionally, society also appreciates them as hermits who can accomplish extraordinary tasks or as men of supernatural insight with erratic, antisocial behavior.⁷¹

In addition to the Japanese partial translation of Yoshikawa and Funayama, a complete, annotated translation of the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* and other remaining biographical corpora in the Chinese-Buddhist canon remains a *desideratum*. The *genre* generally presents a picture of Buddhism that is far more intensely centered on its translational, philosophical and political achievements and the development of Buddhist-Chinese traditions. A glance through the *Shenseng zhuan* revealed that the interpretation of the past, present and especially the future, as well as participation in decision-making processes by means of common divination techniques, were common activities for Chinese Buddhist monks.

71 Guggenmos and Li, *Wahrsagende Mönche*, 231–32.

21 Buddhist Divination?

The engagement of Chinese Buddhists, monastics and lay people in mantic techniques remains ambivalent. The available sources reveal differing perspectives. Retention is characteristic of disciplinary sources as well as philosophical treatments, as harmful side-effects are negotiated without doubting the correctness and possibility of making predictions. Engaging in mantic arts is seen as conflicting with the mindset necessary for spiritual development. Countering this objection, Buddhist divination texts, such as variations of the temple oracle, legitimize the practice of divination by reviving the Chinese trope that divination is performed to resolve doubts (*jueyi* 決疑).⁷² In times of the decay of the Buddhist teaching, a worried mind might be appeased through divination and thus divination becomes a preparatory stage for later spiritual development. Nevertheless, while legitimatizing arguments are found in the introductions to Buddhist divination texts, like the *Consecration* and *Divination sūtras*, the practice itself remains unaffected by these arguments. The ambiguity of any divinatory involvement is further enhanced by the facts a) that the possibility of prediction is taken as granted in both Indian and Chinese culture; and b) that foreknowledge forms part of the supernatural abilities that advanced practitioners are expected to develop.

From the biographies, we gain an additional perspective – here represented by the *Biographies of Thaumaturge Monks*. We see monks acting based on a deeper understanding of karmic connectedness that includes foreknowledge of their own personal and others' lives. While the time of death hardly seems negotiable, knowing of their imminent death allows monks to prepare for it. Through knowing about the deaths of their clients, monks develop the means to deliver their message but also protect their own social survival. While some monks are known for employing certain techniques, such as astrological or physiognomical knowledge, the biographies reveal few details about the practices themselves. This is in line with the general aim of the narrations to increase the fame of those monks and hint at an arcane knowledge that is not meant to be shared. As the compilation includes sources from outside the Buddhist canon, the outsiders' perspective does not necessarily assume that involvement with mantic practices is problematic, but perceives it as a sign of the miraculous power of those monks.

Chinese cultural patterns integrate divination as a natural and significant aspect of social behavior. Buddhist disciplinary and philosophical reflections dealt with this premise over the centuries and developed a pluri-form, mixed

72 Guggenmos, "Qian Divination," 43–70.

response. This was also made possible through the Buddhist concept of impedient means (*upāya*). It is one of the basic Buddhist assumptions that sentient beings engage in different ways with the Buddhist teaching and find their own *famen* 法門, “dharma doors”, of gradually approaching insight and awakening. This concept of belonging has been called “inclusive” in the past.⁷³ The implied rhetoric is that of encouraging increasing engagement with Buddhist doctrine by avoiding exclusion. For the case of lay Buddhists in contemporary Taiwan, I analyzed this form of belonging as an attempt to create an integrative dynamic which does not aim to designate what is non-Buddhist, but seeks to involve practices that are less Buddhist within an overall Buddhist dynamic.⁷⁴ As the underlying concepts are fundamental to the Buddhist traditions, such patterns are likely to surface in Chinese Buddhist historical sources and might have contributed to the emergence of the ambiguous complexity of Chinese-Buddhist forms of divination that are well worth future investigation.

Abbreviations

T. = *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經 [Revised Tripitaka of the Taishō (period)].
 Edited by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭. 85 vols.
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Da bore boluomi jing 大般若波羅蜜多經 [*Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*], T. 220.
Dazhidu lun 大智度論 [The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom], T. 1509.
Fanwang jing 梵網經 [*Brahmajāla-sūtra*], T. 1484
Fo benxing jing 佛本行經 [Sūtra of the past activities of the Buddha], T. 193
Fo shuo Asheshi wangnü Ashuda pusa jing 佛說阿闍貴王女阿術達菩薩經 [Scripture on King Ajātaśatru's daughter named Aśucity as spoken by the Buddha], T. 337.
Gaoseng zhuan 高僧傳 [Biographies of eminent monks], T. 2059.
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73 Kiblinger, *Buddhist Inclusivism*.

74 Guggenmos, “I believe in Buddhism and Travelling,” 217–19.

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Fiction and Divination

Andrew Schonebaum

The religious traditions of China extend beyond what is encompassed by Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism.* These other traditions, with which the “big three” often overlap, are usually grouped together under the rubric of “Chinese folk religion” or simply “Chinese Religion” (see the contribution by Philip Clart in this volume). Chinese Religion is rarely named among the religious traditions of China, ironic, especially given that it undergirds the daily behaviors of so many (by some accounts, it is the world’s third largest religion). Chinese Religion encompasses many practices, many of which seek to attract auspiciousness and avoid bad luck. To do so, you might worship local gods of rivers or city walls, kitchen gods and dragons. You might post talismans on your front door, perform rituals to expel demons, or call back a wandering soul. You might divine your future by consulting an oracle, foretell if a venture will have a favorable outcome by reading an almanac, or compare the important dates and times of birth to ascertain if an engagement will result in a lasting marriage. One of the difficulties in studying Chinese Religion is that it creates a holistic worldview, a systematic cosmos – but the workings of that cosmos are assessed through a wide variety of practices and implied beliefs. Another difficulty is that while many of its practices have accompanying texts (some of which are identified as Daoist), it is not a liturgical religion or one that centers around any particular group of scripture.

For these reasons, the long domestic novels that record the practices of daily life are an important source for understanding how some of these practices were performed (often out of public view) and what some (admittedly fictional) characters and authors thought of them. Ming and Qing Dynasty novels, and here I discuss only the most famous of them, drew heavily on all manner of printed materials, not the least of which was drama and poetry. In the same sense that realism captured and represented aspects of daily life, this high degree of intertextuality and borrowing makes pre-modern novels compendia of vernacular knowledge and values. Novels also borrowed from and

* This chapter has benefitted greatly from the attentiveness and insight of Matthias Schumann, for which I am very grateful. Thanks also to Carolin Tzschentke, and Zhao Lu for their suggestions. Remaining errors, infelicities or omissions are, as ever, my own.

quoted extensively practical texts – medical handbooks, carpentry, almanacs, divinatory manuals, and almost every other guide to daily life.¹ Novels also reveal the extent to which many practices were woven into the fabric of everyday life, casually described without explanation, and in some cases, they are the only known records of some practices. Novels like *Plum in the Golden Vase* (aka *The Golden Lotus*, *Jin ping mei* 金瓶梅) were written by highly educated authors, but in a vernacular language accessible to a variety of readers, which enables us to glimpse the polarizing nature of some practices, like divination, across gender and class lines, and the evolving attitudes toward concepts like fate and retribution.

As divinatory practices touch on practically all aspects of life in China in the premodern period, it will not come as a surprise that all genres of literature in China reflect their influence. To consider fictional narratives as a way of narrowing the focus of such a large topic as “divination in literature” provides some interesting possibilities – the polytextual and polyphonic nature of long narratives of the Ming and Qing display almost every kind of practice. What some scholars consider to be “literati” novels, gives us the opportunity to evaluate attitudes toward these supposedly “low” or “middlebrow” practices, and it gives us a glimpse at how divinatory ideas can be employed as literary figures. Moreover, mantic arts are so consistently, and sometimes thoroughly, represented in premodern fiction that it seems at times to valorize those practices, or at least the cosmic structures that underlie them.

1 Divination in Literature

Divination in China is as old as Chinese writing itself – or older. By the third millennium BCE at the latest, specialists in reading stress cracks in the bones of deer, sheep, pigs, and cattle had already emerged as a distinct occupational group in north China’s Neolithic cultures. During the Shang dynasty (c.1600–c.1050 BCE), the use of these so-called oracle bones reached a high degree of sophistication, often recording the answers to questions both weighty (birth, harvest) and quotidian (tooth ache) in the earliest forms of Chinese characters. Many of the foundational texts in the Chinese tradition attest to the importance of divination in China throughout the Zhou period (c.1050–256 BCE).²

1 See Shang, “The Making of the Everyday World.”

2 See Smith, *Fathoming the Cosmos*, 7–30.

Much of what would come to be known as classic works of Chinese philosophy (*Zhuzi baijia* 諸子百家, or “various masters and hundred schools”), history and poetry, including the *Odes* (*Shi* 詩; later *Shijing* 詩經 or *Classic of Poetry*), the *Documents* (*Shu* 書 or *Shangshu* 尚書; later *Shujing* 書經 or *Classic of history*), the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), the *Record of Ritual* (*Liji* 禮記), record or debate divinatory practices.³ The *Zhou Changes* (*Zhouyi* 周易; later to become the *Yijing* 易經, *I Ching* or *Book of Changes*), originally an oracle and divination manual, later viewed more as a work of philosophy, is certainly the most influential divinatory text in Chinese literary history.⁴

The evolution of the *Book of Changes* from oracle to philosophy is just one example of the ways in which literature and divination in China are intertwined. Many temple oracles are accompanied by poems, which must then be interpreted by a diviner. Poetry in general was thought in some manner, whether because it was closer to the language of nature, or because it was ancient, or some other quality, to encode truth. The phrase “there is a poem as proof” (*you shi wei zheng* 有詩為證) is ubiquitous, found in texts of all kinds, including *Materia Medica* and *Plum in the Golden Vase*. The links between literature and divination extend all the way back to written language, with the first Chinese characters written on “oracle bones” and surviving well into the modern period in the form of written talismans that copy out characters in “spirit writing,” with embellishments and flourishes. These talismans were omnipresent in popular texts, examples from the late Ming to the late Qing are below, drawn from a medical manuscript, an almanac, and a daily-use encyclopedia.

These talismans, all of which are quite similar (though not identical), are found in printed encyclopediae and almanacs and a hand-copied medical text from a period spanning from the early seventeenth century to the early twentieth – demonstrating their ubiquity.

3 In the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (Zuo commentary) alone there are more than 130 accounts of divination: 46 pertaining to oracle bones, 26 pertaining to dreams, 19 pertaining to astrology and the calendar, 18 pertaining to milfoil stalks, and 15 pertaining to omens.

4 It is influential in Western literary history as well. Thinkers and authors from Leibniz, Hegel and Derrida to Philip K. Dick, John Cage, Jorge Luis Borges, and Hermann Hesse have used or discussed the *Yijing* in their work. Perhaps most famously, C.G. Jung wrote about the *Book of Changes*, saying among other things, “Even to the most biased eye, it is obvious that this book represents one long admonition to careful scrutiny of one’s own character, attitude, and motives.” Quoted in Smith, *The “I Ching”*, 198.

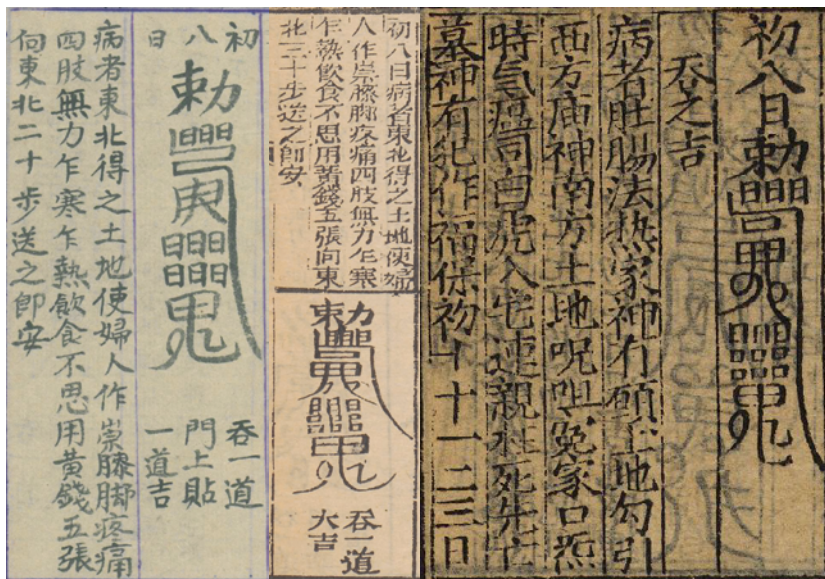


FIGURE 11.1 Talismans to ward off “statutory illness,” *fabing* 法病
In this instance, the demon causing illness was encountered on the 8th day of the month.

(left) 8th Day demon from *Xu Zhenjun yu xiaji* 許真君玉匣記 (Records in a jade casket) manuscript, Late Qing, Sammlung Unschuld 8649.

(center) 8th day demon from a 1797 edition of the almanac *Xinjuan Xu Zhenjun yu xia zengbu zhujia xuanze riyong tongshu* 新鐫許真君玉匣增補諸家選擇日用通書 (The daily use almanac records in a jade casket of Xu Zhenjun, newly engraved and supplemented by various authors).

(right) 8th day demon from a 1612 daily life encyclopedia *Xinban zengbu tianxia bianyong wen linmiaojin wanbao quanshu* 新板增補天下便用文林妙錦萬寶全書 (Complete book of a million treasures, magnificently embroidered and entirely supplemented for the convenient use of all the people in the world, newly printed). 38 *juan*. Liu Shuangsong 劉雙松 ed., Shulin Anzhengtang 書林安正堂, Harvard Yenching Library.

2 History to Fiction to History

The Romance of the Three Kingdoms (*Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義), one of the “masterworks of the Ming Novel” (*sida qishu* 四大奇書 / *sida mingzhu* 四大名著), fictionalizes and mythologizes accounts from the historical Three Kingdoms period (ca. 184–280), in a culmination of a long tradition of entertainment literature to do so. The novel features warring armies, and their cunning generals who battle to outwit, as much as overpower, each other in an effort to either restore or replace the dwindling Han dynasty. As such, the novel spends much

ink on the tactician characters and Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181–234), the master strategist who fights for the heir of the Han, in particular. Historically a politician, statesman, and scholar, early accounts of Zhuge Liang that drew on folk tradition tended to portray him as a Daoist immortal capable of performing magical feats. The *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (written in the fourteenth century, earliest extant edition, 1522) retains only some of these incredible talents. Zhuge's depiction in the novel, often cited as one of the book's great accomplishments, is primarily that of a wise statesman and brilliant tactician who labored tirelessly for his cause even as he realizes it is doomed.⁵ Even so, his abilities in these regards surpass mundane talent.

The Zhuge Liang portrayed in the novel uses all kinds of cunning schemes such as the "empty fort strategy," and the scheme of feigning attack by water using boats full of hay bales on a foggy evening to attract and collect much needed enemy arrows. Even more than having great introspection, and a keen insight into human nature that allows him to predict and manipulate others, Zhuge seemingly knows everything that goes on in the world, even when living as a hermit. Moreover, he is a man of profound understanding, not just of military tactics and developments, but of moral rightness and also of arcane and mantic arts. Zhuge is able to consult the *Book of Changes* and observe celestial phenomena in order to predict the future. His powers are not solely prognosticatory however, his wisdom and moral power enable him to effect change even on the weather.

Zhugue Liang applies the *Liuren* 六壬 (the art of the six Yang Waters) method in order to ascertain the status of a remote battle in chapter 53 of the novel.⁶ He (whom the novel usually refers to as Kongming 孔明) and Liu Xuande 劉玄德 (i.e., Liu Bei 劉備) are organizing a support detachment,

... when its blue-green banner fell over and rolled up. At the same time a south-flying crow passed them, croaking three times. "What do these signs mean Xuande asked?" While riding, Kongming made calculations on his hands under his sleeves (*xiu zhan yi ke* 袖占一課), and replied, "Changsha district is ours! And we have won over important generals. We will learn more this afternoon."

青旗倒捲，一鴉自北南飛，連叫三聲而去。玄德曰：「此應何禍福？」孔明就在馬上袖占一課曰：「長沙郡已得，又主得大將。午時後定見分曉。」⁷

5 Besio, "Zhuge Liang and Zhang Fei," 75.

6 Zhuge Liang also uses the *Qimen dunjia* 奇門遁甲 and *Taiyi* 太乙 methods.

7 Luo Guanzhong, *Sanguo yanyi*, 1:434. Jian Yong 簡雍 does this also in chapter 41.

Some scholars have pointed out how this manner of divination has, until recently, not been studied because it was at once outside of the Confucian corpora and also a military practice to be kept secret.⁸ For our purposes, it suffices to note that Zhuge Liang, in addition to acting as a scholar who can perceive changes in the hearts of men and in the formations of the battlefield, can also see far-away places as well as the future, and he can even influence them.⁹

At one point in the novel, after all preparations have been made for the fire attack on (the brilliant villain, King of Wei) Cao Cao's 曹操 (155–220) fleet, the commander of the Southland suddenly realizes that for his plan to succeed, the wind must blow from the southeast or his own fleet would catch fire. When he sees the wind blowing from the northwest, he vomits blood, faints and becomes sick. Zhuge Liang visits him and points out the root cause of his illness – his worries about the wind. He claims that he knows magical arts and has the ability to change the direction of the wind. An altar is set up and Zhuge Liang performs detailed *Qimen dunjia* 奇門遁甲 (Strange Gates Escaping Techniques) rituals there for days and indeed, the southeast wind starts blowing just before the fire attack is launched (chapter 49). Zhuge Liang also reads the hero Zhang Fei's 張飛 death in the stars (chapter 81), and later predicts his own death through an incantatory ritual (chapter 103). He is not the only character in the novel with these talents, but he is depicted as the ideal of the scholar-gentleman who does not seek power for himself but only to realize his notions of proper government.

Today, Zhuge Liang is attributed with the composition of a number of prognosticatory texts that are still in use, including the *Miben Zhuge shenshu* 秘本諸葛神數 (The secret book of Zhuge [Liang's] divine calculations), the book *Qimen dunjia* [method], a five-coin method, the movement of the stars for divining military strategy in the *Zhuge bingfa* 諸葛兵法 (Zhuge's art of war), a divinatory method called *Maqian ke* 馬前課 (Quick predictions), and at times has been attributed as the author of *Yuxia ji* 玉匣記 (Records in a jade casket), the almanac and divinatory text, ubiquitous in China for at least two or three centuries. Chen Shou's 陳壽 (233–297) biography of Zhuge Liang in the official *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (History of the Three Kingdoms) makes no mention of his having any interest in the divinatory arts, and nothing like the divinatory texts

8 Ho, *Chinese Mathematical Astrology*, 116–7. Ho goes into great detail about the Liuren system in his chapter 5, 115–38.

9 Ho notes that “Chinese novels abound with mentions of ‘xiu zhong yi ke’ (a divination done under the sleeves), that Li Ruzhen in his *Jinghua yuan* regards as being how immortals get news of happenings in distant places and seek foreknowledge of coming events.” Ho, *Chinese Mathematical Astrology*, 137.

mentioned above are contained in his “collected works,” the *Zhuge Liangji* 諸葛亮集, nor in the more expansive *Zhuge Liang quanshu* 諸葛亮全書 (Complete works of Zhuge Liang), even though the latter contains a number of apocryphal works. Such divinatory attributions are the result of later tradition, most notably by the novel, where Zhuge Liang is represented as a master of *Qimen dunjia* (for this technique, see Richard Smith’s contribution in this volume), which is still in use today. The novel, having created an image of Zhuge Liang as a master of mantic arts, led to his apotheosis in the public imaginary, leading back to even more mythologized acts in subsequent stories, as the object of worship of many temples and shrines,¹⁰ and as a door god.¹¹



FIGURE 11.2 Illustrations regarding Zhuge Liang
 Left: Zhuge Liang, from the nineteenth century (?) album *Ming jiang tuce* 名將圖冊 (Portraits of famous generals). Waseda University Library.
 Center: Title page from *Zhuge kongming yi chuanqi lun zhujie pinglin* 諸葛孔明異傳奇論注解評林 (Commentated and annotated edition of *The Wondrous Tale of Zhuge Kong Ming*) (1598), courtesy National Diet Library, Japan.
 Right: Title page of *Miben Zhuge shenshu* 秘本諸葛神數 (The secret book of Zhuge [Liang's] divine calculations) (1918 ed.), courtesy of the University of California, Berkeley. Examples of divinatory manuals attributed to Zhuge Liang.

10 Among the most famous are the Temple of the Marquis of Wu 武侯祠 in Chengdu, Sichuan, and the Temple of the Marquis of Wu 武侯祠 in Baidicheng, Chongqing.
 11 Usually in partnership with Sima Yi 司馬懿 of Wei 魏.

Door Gods themselves are intertwined with divination and fortune-telling, at least according to one famous source. The novel *Xiyou ji* 西遊記 (*Journey to the West*; earliest edition 1592), provides a fictional account (often taken for fact) of how door gods originated. This account also comprises the earliest written fragment of that story, a passage of a little less than 1,100 characters, preserved in the scant surviving remnants of the *Yongle dadian* 永樂大典 (the encyclopedic collection compiled in 1403–1408 under commission of the Ming emperor Chengzu 成祖, r. 1402–1424). The *Yongle dadian* extract is listed under an old source named *Xiyou ji*, which may well have existed as a kind of *Urtext* for all the dramatic and narrative works by that title which followed. This full text, unfortunately, is now lost, and the lack of information on authorship, texts, and publisher prohibits any conclusion other than the existence of a document or documents by such name two centuries before the circulation of the full-length novel.

The passage constitutes a remarkable parallel to portions of chapter 9 in the hundred-chapter narrative (chapter 10 in the 1592 edition). The fuller version of the story found in the novel begins with a woodcutter and fisherman engaging in a friendly, poetic debate about the virtues of mountains and rivers.¹² The fisherman mentions that every day he gives a golden carp to a master fortuneteller (*maigua de xiansheng* 賣卦的先生) who plies his trade on West Gate Street in Chang'an. In return, the fortuneteller consults the sticks in his sleeve (*xiu zhan yi ke* 袖傳一課), and tells him where to fish. The master's predictions are, naturally, unfailingly accurate – he is after all the uncle of Yuan Tiangang 袁天罡 (573–645), president of the Imperial Board of Astronomy (Chao Qintianjian taizheng 朝欽天監台正).¹³ The Dragon King of the Jiang River hears of this fortuneteller, Yuan Shoucheng 袁守誠 who is abetting the extermination of all of his water-kin (fish), and goes to seek him out. Dressing as a scholar (*xiushi* 秀士), he asks the master how much rain will fall tomorrow. Yuan replies that the next day three feet, three inches and forty-eight drops of rain will fall at the hour of *wu* 午 (11:00–13:00). The Dragon King makes a bet with the master in the amount of fifty taels of gold that his prediction will be wrong. Shortly after they agree on the bet, the Jade Emperor sends a decree that the Dragon King make it rain three feet, three inches and forty-eight drops at the hour of *wu*, exactly as Yuan had predicted. The Dragon King decides to

12 A clear reference to the famously cryptic *Analect* 6.23 “The wise take joy in rivers, while the Good take joy in mountains.”

13 In the *Xiyou ji* fragment from the *Yongle dadian*, the fisherman refers to him as Shenyan shanren 神言山人, and his placard announces that “The Wonderful Physiognomist Yuan Shoucheng 袁守成 Tells Fortunes Here.”

make it rain only two feet and at the hour of *wei* 未 (13:00–15:00), in order to win the bet. When he goes to collect, the Master reveals that he knew that the scholar was the Dragon King of the Jiang River in disguise, and that his prediction had been accurate. Moreover, for defying the decree of the Jade Emperor, Yuan Shoucheng predicts that Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643), the under-minister of the Tang Empire, will behead the Dragon King at the hour of *wu* 午 (11:00–13:00). The Dragon King asks for help and Yuan sends him to the Emperor Tang Taizong 唐太宗 (r. 626–649) to beg for clemency.

The Dragon King appears to Taizong in a dream saying that the emperor is the true dragon, and that he is only a false dragon. Surely, a true dragon can save a false one. Taizong agrees to intercede with Wei Zheng. Wei, for his part, studied the movement of the stars and burned incense. A heavenly messenger approached him and delivered the Jade Emperor's command to execute the dragon. Taizong, seeking to prevent Wei from executing the dragon, invites him for an afternoon of conversation and chess. After they play for a few hours, Wei Zheng puts his head down and falls asleep. When he wakes, he apologizes for his rudeness to the emperor, and is forgiven. They resume their game of chess, only to be disturbed by a commotion in the marketplace. They are told that a bloody dragon head has fallen from the sky. Wei Zheng admits that during his sleep, he dreamt that he executed the Dragon King, according to the Jade Emperor's command.¹⁴ Taizong feels badly that he was not able to keep his promise to the Dragon King, but he also feels encouraged that he has such loyal ministers as Wei Zheng, for if he had such worthies at his court, there was no need to worry about the security of his empire.

Following this episode, the Dragon King lodges a complaint in the underworld against Taizong, who then falls ill. During his illness, the ministers Qin Shubao 秦叔寶 and Yuchi Gong 尉遲公 stand guard by the door to protect against demons. Taizong is able to sleep with them standing guard, but after a few nights, he feels badly that he is imposing on his ministers, and decides to have portraits of them made by a skilled painter and have them pasted on the door. These and subsequent episodes all go to show what a virtuous emperor Tang Taizong is, and how he is able to attract worthy and loyal ministers to his court. Thus, when he selects Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664) (Tripitaka) to go on a journey to India to seek Buddhist scriptures, even the deity Guanyin 觀音 is pleased at his choice.

14 This is where the *Yongle dadian* fragment ends – simply stating that the emperor wanted to save the dragon and was surprised by this turn of events, after which they stopped their game of chess.

This fragment suggests that the episode of Wei Zheng executing the Dragon King in a dream was a part of the *Journey to the West* stories and dramas for at least two centuries before the hundred-chapter novel was published. As such, it seems key to understanding the journey which is to become the characters' journey and the journey of the story itself. This episode also makes use of what the commentator Liu Yiming 劉一明 (1734–1820) referred to as the method of “first striking down the false when one wants to show forth the true” (*yu shizhen er xian pijia zhi fa* 欲示真而先劈假之法). That is, the true dragon, Tang Taizong, is revealed with the downfall of the “false” dragon of the Jiang river. Yet, there is a higher power than even the virtuous Taizong – fate. Not even the true dragon can intervene when it comes to the decrees of Heaven.

The fortuneteller in this episode consults the “sticks in his sleeve,” but *Journey to the West* generally presents fortune-tellers as figures of the marketplace, or as monsters who use their powers for evil. It is against these that “true” fortunetellers are portrayed – the bodhisattvas, celestial beings and other enlightened characters who are able to see the future without recourse to divinatory practice. The implication throughout the novel is not that divination is not a true art, but rather that divination is a set of practices that the unenlightened use to predict the future. Those who are truly wise and powerful, such as Buddha, have “foreknowledge without divination” (*weibu xianzhi zhi fa* 未卜先知之法).¹⁵ Liu Yiming, one of the most famous commentators on the novel, quotes from the *Book of Changes* when he asserts that “[the heart of] *Journey to the West* is the same as the teachings of Confucius on the exhaustive ‘investigation of truth’ [*qiongli* 窮理] the ‘perfection of nature’ [*jinxing* 盡性], and the fulfilment of one’s fate [*zhiming* 至命].”¹⁶ The novel functions as a divinatory text and the fulfilment of its predictions, together.

3 Fiction Explicates Fortunes, Fortunes Explicate Fiction

The most famous, and the “greatest” of premodern Chinese novels, *The Story of the Stone* (aka *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢, hereafter *Stone*) features characters who have otherworldly sight and knowledge of the

15 This phrase occurs in *Xiyou ji*, chap. 7, 1:168 and again in chap. 62, 3:167. Many terms from Buddhism and “internal alchemy” implicate divination (*shu* 術) throughout *Xiyou ji*, for instance in the case of the term “four signs” (*si xiang* 四相), and the “three primes” (*san yuan* 三元), suggesting that the author/compiler/editor of the novel had a good knowledge of mantic arts and was happy to use them allegorically even if there was some skepticism toward practitioners.

16 Liu Yiming, “How to Read *The Original Intent of the Journey to the West*,” 307.

future, but that novel consistently asserts that while divinatory techniques can produce accurate data about the future, one has to be a sensitive reader to make use of it. As in other literati novels of the time, characters often refer to the mantic arts casually or jokingly, suggesting that those characters, like their presumed readers, may not have taken practitioners of those arts very seriously. Wang Xifeng 王熙鳳, for instance, mentions that she needs a fortune-teller when she misplays her hand in a game of dominos.¹⁷ In another instance, Jia Yucun 賈雨村, a corrupt minor official who owes his post to the Jia family, is advised to claim that Xue Pan 薛蟠 who is accused of murder, but whom Yucun is reluctant to prosecute, has “died of a sudden illness.” To back up this claim, he should pretend to be able to consult spirits through the planchette [divine altar, *jitan*] (善能扶鸞請仙, 堂上設了乩壇), who then “confirm” that plaintiff and defendant were enemies in a former existence and were fated to clash in order to settle scores. The falsified planchette reading would state that, hounded by the victim’s ghost; Xue Pan perished of some mysterious disease.¹⁸ The attitudes of these characters, at times casually dismissive of divination, or falsely practicing it in an act of corrupt deception, are belied by the world of the novel itself, which is undergirded by the structures, rules, and interventions of the supernatural world.

As in other domestic novels, divination is taken seriously when a character is actually ill. In *Stone*, one of the masters of the house consults a fortune-teller when his second wife falls ill. He discovers that her stars were temporarily in collision with those of some other female born under the sign of the rabbit – his concubine, who is already in competition with the other wives for their husband’s favor. It was her astral influences that were harming the second wife, and her subsequent removal from her rooms causes a great deal of anger and jealousy. This is a device we see in many works of fiction – that divination both reveals and creates enmity, especially between women, in a household. Divination and enmity are linked by making the implicit explicit – by reading

17 可是我要算一算命呢! Chap. 47, 538. Quotations from the *Honglou meng*, unless otherwise noted, are from Cao Xueqin, *Bajia pingpi Honglou meng*.

18 Chap. 4. Yucun may be somewhat more sympathetic than my brief summary implies, since he declines to fake the planchette reading, though this is really because it would not “stop people from talking.” But he may also be reluctant to do so since he believes in fate. Learning about what has happened to the young woman over whom the fracas leading in murder occurred, he sighs sympathetically, and remarks that the murder victim and the trafficked woman’s meeting must have been the working out of destiny. Lastly, this episode also facetiously invokes mantic arts when Yucun originally learns that Xue Pan is a member of a powerful house by consulting a handbook for local officials entitled 護官符 “Amulet for Protecting Officials.”

aloud for illiterate or obtuse characters the structures of dominance and contestation that are the nature of their unhappiness.

Exception to the general suspicion of fortunetellers is made for expediency in emergencies. Usually, as will be discussed below, this is the case when a character is very sick, and divination is employed as prognosis. Working backwards from prognosis, characters can take foreknowledge to mediate between conflicting doctors' reports about the cause and course of illness. Just as some doctors announce that they are quacks with their double-speak and efficacious doctors can diagnose simply by feeling the pulses, readers can easily distinguish between fortunetellers who possess real skill, and those who are widely disparaged.¹⁹ Distinguishing between the talented and the scoundrels is sometimes a matter of trying and failing to trick them. Sometimes a powerful fortuneteller is clearly distinguished by an unusual appearance. When the matriarch of the Jia 賈 family falls ill, after walking through the now desolate, perhaps haunted garden, her son Jia Rong 賈蓉 asks "Half Immortal Mao" (Mao banxian 毛半仙) to divine the cause and outcome of her illness. He beseeches the Supreme Ultimate, the Generative Powers of the Cosmos, the Holy Signs in the Great River, and the Four Sages – Fu Xi 伏羲, King Wen (Wen Wang 文王), the Duke of Zhou (Zhou Gong 周公) and Confucius – for an efficacious response to his inquiry. The text then narrates how he throws coins to create trigrams (printed in some editions of the novel) and then consults the *Book of Changes* to interpret the hexagram made when they are combined. Through the process of interpreting the hexagram, the reader identifies with her son, "At the beginning of this rigmarole it was all Jia Rong could do to keep a straight face. But gradually Mao impressed him as a man who knew what he was talking about, and when he went on to predict misfortune for Cousin Zhen 賈珍, Jia Rong began to take him rather more seriously." Mao admits the limits of the method in which he specializes, "I am afraid a precise diagnosis lies beyond the limitations of even a more elaborate milfoil reading of the *Changes*. For that, you would have to cast a Six Cardinal (*daliu ren* 大六壬) horoscope."²⁰ After being given the stems and branches of the patient, Mao adjusts his diviner's compass, setting the coordinates for the heavenly generals. He predicts a "dissolution of the soul" (*po hua ke* 魄化課, or "dissolution of the material soul") with a delivering spirit leading to a "restoration of the spirit" (*po hua hun gui*

19 One easy way to make this distinction is if they accept payment, which means they are quacks or charlatans. See Levenson, "The Amateur Ideal"; and Schonebaum, *Novel Medicine*.

20 Cao Xueqin, *Story of the Stone*, chap. 102, 5:74, I follow Hawkes, with emendations, 5:75. Ho Peng Yoke has some theories as to why the *liuren* method was superior to the *Yijing* in the prediction of mundane affairs in his *Chinese Mathematical Astronomy*, 32.

魄化魂歸, “dissolution of the material soul and return of the spiritual soul”), a prediction as much of the entire Jia family fortune, as the course of one or two of its characters.²¹

Stone, like other novels, uses divination as foreshadowing. It also represents prognosticatory practices as things that require sensitive reading – akin to using poems as proof. Characters in the novel consistently demonstrate their talents at reading and composing poems and debating the meaning of passages in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 and other classics. It is clear that some characters – particularly (important female characters) Lin Daiyu 林黛玉 and Xue Baochai 薛寶釵, are superior readers. So, in chapter 101 when Xifeng, ill, goes to the temple to pray to the Bodhisattva of the Sacred Flowers, she draws a divination lot predicting her future, and the Abbess interprets the oracle that “Wang Xifeng comes home to rest, in finery arrayed” (*Wang Xifeng yijin huanxiang* 王熙鳳衣錦還鄉) as a good omen because she is a literal, surface reader of the poetic text and common phrase. Xifeng, a savvy household manager and master schemer, shows that she is a more sophisticated reader (though marginally literate) when she reveals her doubts. Baochai too mulls over the text of Xifeng’s fate. She says, “everyone else says it’s a lucky omen, but personally I think the phrase “returns home in splendor” may have a deeper meaning” (據我看, 這『衣錦還鄉』四字裡頭還有緣故 ...).²² Baoyu 寶玉, the scion of the wealthy Jia family, accuses her of being skeptical, “forever trying to twist the meaning of the text (*wangjie shengyi* 妄解聖意) where the truth [of its fortuitousness] is common knowledge, why read some other meaning into it (*haiyou shenme biede jieshuo* 還有什麼別的解說)?” This exchange serves to remind readers that Baochai has always been superior to Baoyu in composing and understanding verse. But before Baochai is able to elaborate, she is called away.²³ The true meaning of the oracle is hinted at in the chapter title couplet, which always predict what is about to happen, and thereby explain it, “In Grand View Garden a Moonlit Spirit Repeats a Warning / At Scattered Flowers Convent the Fortune-sticks Give an Alarming Omen” (大觀園月夜警幽魂 / 散花寺神籤驚異兆).²⁴ The omen is really only alarming to savvy readers, and borne out a few chapters later when Wang Xifeng dies, deliriously calling for a boat and sedan-chair so that she can return to her ancestral home of Jinling 金陵.

21 Cao Xueqin, *The Story of the Stone*, chap. 102, 5:74.

22 Cao Xueqin, *Bajia pingpi Honglou meng*, chap. 101, 2328.

23 Ibid.

24 *The Story of the Stone*, chap. 101, 5:43.

In one of the most important episodes in *Stone*, the protagonist, Jia Baoyu, loses the jade talisman that was in his mouth when he was born. The other characters in the novel believe the jade to be Baoyu's soul, upon which "his very life depends." Although it is the eleventh month, the crab-apple trees in Baoyu's residence that have been withered for a year suddenly burst into bloom. Everyone, except the ailing Xi-feng, rushes over to have a look at the sight. There is disagreement whether this is a good or ill omen. Baoyu does not wear his jade when he goes to look at the blossoms, and when he returns, he finds that the jade is missing. In its absence, Baoyu falls ill and becomes insensate. The family members, in a panic, consult all of the fortunetellers of the marketplace. One of them, Iron Mouth Liu (Liu Tiezui 劉鐵嘴), divines the character *shang* 賞, and gives a detailed glyphomantic (*chaizi* 拆字) reading of its meaning. He says

we should be careful to notice that the radical element was *bei* 貝, meaning "a cowry shell" and *not* the similar radical *jian* 見 meaning "to appear" hence the object's disappearance.... And the top element of the whole was very like *dang* 當 meaning "to pawn" so we should go straight to the pawnshop. Then he pointed out that by adding a *ren* 人 "man" to the left-hand side, the compound *chang* 償 meaning "to redeem" was formed. Find the man in the pawnshop, pay the price, and the lost object will be redeemed....²⁵

Some have interpreted this passage to mean that the author(s) were skeptical of fortunetelling, or of this method of fortunetelling, but as with the above example, it is really a matter of reading well. Later, when a mysterious monk brings the jade back, we discover that the data was correct, but its interpretation was off. Again, it is Xue Baochai who (after the fact) realizes the correct parsing: "You said it had something to do with a pawnshop. But now I can see it was really pointing to the word 'monk' (*shang* 尚), which is contained in the upper part of the character *shang* 賞. We were being told by the word-diviner that a monk had taken it!"²⁶

While they are searching for the jade, one character says, "if you ask me, all of those word-diviners and fortunetellers you find on the street are all charlatans," right before she recommends the secular Buddhist nun, Adamantina (Miaoyu 妙玉) for her skill in consulting the planchette (*xianji* 仙機).

25 Ibid, chap. 94, 4:337-39.

26 Ibid., chap. 116, 5:295.

Adamantina's hand and that of a friend are guided by an unseen spirit (we are later told that she invoked Iron Crutch Li, Li Tieguai 李鐵拐) to write verse in sand. Adamantina, another superior reader, makes no attempt to interpret the poem, the meaning of which is clear to readers who know the origins of the jade:

Alas, it left no trace nor sign / Gone to Greensickness Peak to lie / at the
foot of an age-old pine / why traverse countless mountains / searching for
your friend / follow me and laugh to see / your journey at an end!²⁷

This puts the readers in the shoes of the prognosticator, left to use their experience to read between the lines and understand the world-system of the novel hinted at by divinatory glimpses. Moreover, the theme of insightful reading is entwined with the motif of the entire novel – namely the interplay of truth and fiction, “truth becomes fiction when the fictions’ true / real becomes not-real when the unreal’s real,” the possibility of using fiction to bolster health and achieve enlightenment, but the danger of misreading it – namely not looking for its deeper meaning and being ensnared by the earthly desires it represents.²⁸ In this case, both of the divinatory methods were precise, it was the interpretation that led to false conclusions.²⁹

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the title, dreams are among the most important prognosticatory media in *Stone*. Dreams are the bridge between truth and fiction, but also between now and the future. They need to be read in the same attentive way that fiction needs to be read – with attention to their construct-
edness, their figures, structures and themes. *Stone* explicitly and implicitly reminds the reader that it is fiction, yet it also questions the nature of truth, particularly when it comes to human feeling,

When grief for fiction's idle words
More real than human life appears,
Reflect that life itself's a dream
And do not mock the reader's tears.³⁰

27 Ibid., chap. 95, 5: 305. The titular Stone begins and ends his story at the base of Greensickness Peak (*Qinggen feng* 青埂峰).

28 *The Story of the Stone*, chap. 5, 1:130. The novel's insistence on good reading is repeated throughout, as well as in prefaces and commentary. See Schonebaum, “Introduction.”

29 In one instance, it literally led to finding a false jade, carved to be an exact replica of Baoyu's talisman.

30 *The Story of the Stone*, chap. 120, 5:356.

Jia Baoyu's dream visit to the land of illusion in chapter five, in which he is escorted by the Fairy Disenchantment (Jinghuan xiangu 警幻仙姑) to the administrative offices of the ill-fated fair, where he sees images and captions of the fates of most of the major women characters in the novel, and where he is then brought to a performance that also reveals those same fates in verse, is a key to the novel. Baoyu does not understand the meaning or gravity of his dream until he revisits the Land of Illusion (*taixu jing* 太虛境) again (this time named the Paradise of Truth, *Zhenru fudi* 真如福地), one-hundred and eleven chapters later. Having learned the fates of the main female characters in the novel so early on does not impede the sense that the novel is extremely "real," since the emotions it elicited in the readers were true fact.³¹ Fate is real, not just in the sense that prognostications are accurate, but in that characters in fiction meet their fates – significantly, inevitably, and poetically.

Stone again and again questions its own fictionality and constructedness. Despite all of the omens and oracles in its pages coming true, characters treat mantic practice as chicanery, a stance that is a necessary accessory to the literary device. Without skepticism there would be fatalism. Baoyu jokes that Baochai can foretell the future.

"What nonsense!" Baochai laughed. "I simply guessed at what the oracle meant. How can you take it seriously? You're as bad as my second sister-in-law. When you lost your jade, she asked Adamantina to consult the planchette; and when nobody could understand what it wrote she assured me secretly that Adamantina could foretell the future and had attained enlightenment. How is it, then, that Adamantina didn't know of the terrible thing that was about to befall her? Can this count as foretelling the future? Even if I hit upon the truth about Xifeng, I didn't really know what was going to happen to her. I don't even know what's going to happen to me, so how can I tell about you? All such auguries are bogus. How can you believe in them?"

寶釵笑道：「這是又胡鬧起來了。我是就他求的籤上的話混解的，你就認了真了。你和我們二嫂子成了一樣的了：你失了玉，他去求妙玉扶乩，批出來，眾人不解，他背地裡合我說，妙玉怎麼前知，怎麼參禪悟道，如今他遭此大難，如何自己都不知道？這可是算得前知嗎？就是我偶然說著了二奶奶的事情，其實知道他是怎麼樣了？只怕我連我自己也不知道呢。這些事情，原都是虛誕的，可是信得的麼？」³²

31 This was not the case for early readers of the novel in English who criticized the novel's supernatural aspects saying that it undermined its realism. See Schonebaum, "Medicine."

32 *The Story of the Stone*, chap. 114, 51524.

But Baochai did interpret the omen correctly, as Baoyu's father Jia Zheng 賈政 did during the lantern festival of chapter 22 in which all of the young ladies' lantern riddles seemed to him like ill-omens of their meager fates. The novel pushes the reader to realize that fortunetelling is about good reading, or rather that good reading *is* fortunetelling. It is about looking past surface fiction for the deeper truth, which is how it is possible to achieve enlightenment through a contemplation of fictional form.³³

If oracles, like fiction, required a sensitive sort of reading, it is curious that one of *Stone's* most famous commentators felt (remarkably) that *Stone* was itself an oracle. Zhang Xinzhi 張新之 (fl. 1828–1850) believed that the *Book of Changes* was a key to unlocking the meaning in *Stone*.³⁴ His *Miaofu xuan* 妙復軒 (aka *Taiping xianren* 太平閒人) commentary draws on the notion found in the *Changes* and elsewhere that the constant transformation of outward form conceals patterns of coherence. Zhang Xinzhi was also fond of mapping characters in the novel to different hexagrams in the *Book of Changes*.³⁵ He explains his revelation, “the whole book was nothing more or less than the way of the *Changes*! In fact, my commentary on the *Story of the Stone* really began from this point.”³⁶

I quote one entry in its entirety to demonstrate Zhang's train of thought and how completely he envisions the author of *Stone* was influenced by the *Book of Changes*:

Let us take Grannie Liu as an example. She corresponds to a pure *kun* hexagram, in which the “old *yin*” generates a “young *yang*” which explains why she saves Jiaojie. Now Jiaojie's birthday is on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month, and the number seven is the numerical equivalent of the “young *yang*.” But *yin* does not suddenly become *yin*; it must begin from a single *yin* line. When a single *yin* line appears in the initial position at the bottom of the hexagram, it forms the new hexagram *gou*. If

33 As the character Stone itself argues to Vanitas (Kongkong daoren 空空道人) in the first chapter of the novel. Schonebaum, “Introduction,” 59–69.

34 This interpretation, elucidated in interlineal and chapter-end comments, was also clearly expressed in the prefatory “how to read” essay. The two entries that most forcefully argue for this interpretation were excised from some versions (with all others left intact) which suggests, possibly, that this interpretation was not widely accepted, or at least not by the publisher. The theory though, was at least widely known, published as it was in virtually all popular editions of *Honglou meng* (*Jinyu yuan* 金玉緣 and *Shitouji* 石頭記) of the last decades of the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth.

35 An approach also used on the *Xiyou ji*. *Yijing* numerology also plays a role, albeit small, in Jin Shengtan's 金聖歎 (1608–1661) commentary on the *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳.

36 In Rolston, *How to Read*, 336.

we take Baoyu to be the embodiment of pure *yang*, then the “first taste of clouds and rain” represents the entry of a *yin* line into the first position, thus forming the hexagram *gou*. That explains why this scene is immediately followed up by the scene of “Grannie Liu’s first entry into the Rongguo mansion.” After the *yin* line has moved into place, the process continues in orderly sequence, bringing us to the hexagram *bo*, at which point Grannie Liu’s true image finally takes shape, with a single *yang* line significantly left over at the top of the hexagram. Now, *bo* is the hexagram of the ninth month, which at the juncture with the tenth month is replaced by *kun*. That is why her arrival takes place at the end of the season of autumn and the beginning of winter, the very height of the season of “greater goings and lesser comings.” For this reason, when the narrator is searching for a narrative thread to follow, he describes a “small, humble family” and says that this “small, humble family was surnamed Wang” and descended from a “small, humble official in the capital.” Here the words “small, humble” appear three times in all, comprising six occurrences of the character *xiao* 小, all of which has an ineffable meaning. The three horizontal lines in the *qian* trigram [☰] correspond to the three horizontal strokes in the character *wang* [王] which, when we add a straight line intersecting them, splits them vertically, forming the *kun* [☷] trigram. [Zhang is comparing the written form of Grannie Liu’s son-in-law, Wang, with the form of the *kun* trigram]. The splitting proceeds from bottom to top. When the first line is split it forms the trigram *xun* [☴] representing the eldest daughter, which is why we have a mother living in the daughter’s house. When the second line is split, it forms the trigram *ken* [☶], corresponding to a dog, which is why her son-in-law is called Gou’er [“little dog”]. When the third line is split, it forms the trigram *kun* which represents the minister as opposed to the ruler. This is why she has a family member serving in an official capacity, with clan links to the Wang family. On this basis, this is doubled to form the entire *kun* hexagram composed of six lines. The successive moves from *gou* to *dun* to *pi* to *guan* to *bo* and then to *kun* all derive from the idea of advancement from smallness. The force of this is extremely advantageous, one that cannot be suppressed. The linking of the families was in order to gain power and advantage and the Rongguo mansion is at this point in a phase of prosperity whose apex is still far off which is why these people are accepted as distant relatives. Of Gou’er’s grandfather we are only told that he was surnamed Wang and a native of the place [lit, the local soil] but no given name is supplied. With respect to the expression “local soil,” we note that *kun* represents the earth, but in this case, the “way of the earth” is not

successful, and the generations are about to come to an end. That is why he has no given name, but his son is named “Cheng” [success], because he will carry on his physical descent. If Gou-er is equivalent to the *ken* trigram, Wang Cheng also corresponds to a *ken* trigram. *Ken* is the trigram of the northeast, where the myriad things of creation reach both the end and the beginning of the process of completion. This is why he is called “Cheng.” Also, the northeast is marked by the intersection of winter and spring phases. That is why he has a son named Ban’er, since the character *ban* 板 is composed of the graph for wood [mu 木] and the phonetic element *fan* 反 [to return], thus expressing the idea that the season of water cedes, giving way to the return of the season of wood. He also has a daughter named Qing’er, *qing* 青 being the archetypal color of the element “wood,” which grows from north to east, which is equivalent to the birth of the “young *yang*” out of the “old *yin*”. In the five phases scheme the trigram *ken* signifies earth, which is why he is engaged in agriculture as an occupation. As long as the old widow has no offspring, her *yin* cannot engender life. After a long period over several generations, the cycle of ending and beginning makes a complete revolution [*zhenyuan yunhui* 貞元運會]. It has been thus since time immemorial. And so, the sage composed the *Yijing*, in which *yang* is elevated and *yin* is suppressed, to the point at which no outside influence on the system is possible. This is the true seed of continuous creation, which must be painstakingly nurtured. That is why this character is called Grannie Liu, “Liu” is homophonus with *liu* 留 “to preserve.” It is too bad that most people are bounded by the limitations of their mortal existence and consciousness and fail to understand the significance of just this one character Grannie Liu, so that she is subject to ridicule by the likes of Wang Xifeng [a character in the novel]. What a shame!³⁷

Zhang was not unique among premodern commentators in his assertion that one or another of the long novels were essentially narrative elucidations of the Confucian classics. Zhang even extends the parallel by conflating the divinatory practice of reading hexagrams with “word-divination” (glyphomancy) by viewing written characters contained in the text of the novel as hexagram-like. That is, he read *Stone* the same way as he read the *Yijing*. His views may not have gained much traction, and certainly his critical insight was underwhelming to some. One of his less forgiving detractors commented, “This kind of person

37 Zhang Xinzhi, “How to Read the *Dream of the Red Chamber*,” trans. by Andrew Plaks, in Rolston, *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, 336–38, with some small amendments.

cannot even read himself, yet he goes and composes a 'how to read' essay."³⁸ However, his guide to reading *Stone* was reprinted in many popular editions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and therefore presumably had wide readership. We know that the variety of readers consumed *Stone* differently, and the novel itself acknowledges its various uses when it claims,

I am only saying that the contemplation of [the story's characters'] actions and motives may prove a more effective antidote to boredom and melancholy [than other novels]. And even the inelegant verses with which my story is interlarded could serve to entertain and amuse on those convivial occasions when rhymes and riddles are in demand.... My only wish is that men in the world below may sometimes pick up this tale when they are recovering from sleep or drunkenness, or when they wish to escape from business worries or a fit of the dumps and in doing so find not only mental refreshment but even perhaps, if they will heed its lesson and abandon their vain and frivolous pursuits, some small arrest in the deterioration of their vital forces.³⁹

The novel itself suggests that readers might consider the novel primarily for the actions of its characters, or read it just for the poetry, or as a warning not to fritter away wealth, or as a true record of remarkable young women, or as harmless entertainment, or as vehicle to enlightenment. With such varied uses of the novel, and with so many readers of differing abilities and backgrounds, it is certainly possible, that while some found Zhang's assertion that *Stone* is a fictionalized *Yijing* to be worthy of erasure, others must have found it compelling, coercive, or even an example of how the elite read novels, and how they should be read. At its most basic, these views were simply that *The Story of the Stone* was as complicated as the cosmos, and required the same sort of sensitive reading in order to understand it.

4 Divining Fiction / Fictional Divination

Just how much we can learn about divination by looking at even one of these long, vernacular novels of the premodern period, especially one that quotes and cites from every kind of extant text, as does the *Plum in the Golden Vase*, is an investigation that would require far more room than the current chapter

38 Yehe, "Du *Honglou meng zhaji*," 286. This is a late-Qing work. Quoted in Rolston, *ibid.*, 322.
39 Cao Xueqin, *The Story of the Stone*, chap. 1, 17.

can cover in detail, to say nothing of how an understanding of divination illuminates the ways in which novels create meaning. Thus, let us consider, with some examples, the kinds of things such an investigation might uncover. First, some background. *Jin ping mei* 金瓶梅 (The plum in the golden vase, hereafter *Plum*), is a novel published in the first or second decade of the seventeenth century, but written and first circulated in the decades before that. It is the story of a merchant and his household, which rises in glory and wealth as he, Ximen Qing 西門慶, is appointed to official posts and abuses those positions. His many wives and servants, their lives and machinations to gain access to Ximen, and to control information as means to have some measure of power, comprises much of the story.

Plum represents all sorts of mantic and apotropaic practice, from women “walking off the hundred ailments” (*zoubaibing er qu le* 走百病兒去了)⁴⁰ on the night of the Lantern festival, to the prognostications of “Yinyang Master” Xu (*yinyang* Xu xiansheng 陰陽徐先生). Sometimes characters or the narrator make it clear that they think apotropaic methods are spurious, but more often than not, it is a wariness of (especially professional) practitioners rather than a belief that the narrator or author exposes. The narration also addresses the reader directly on a number of occasions, in “gentle reader” (*kanguan* 看官) statements. These fall generally into one of two categories, either the narrator is explaining or pointing out complicated aspects of the plot, or the narrator is giving the reader advice on aspects of daily life. Assuming that the advice is not ironic, if only because it is consistent with prevailing literati attitudes of the time, and it is consistent throughout the novel, the warnings are invariably about the deceitfulness of humans, particularly women. *Plum* warns the reader against those who seek only money – hangers-on, sing-song girls, monks and nuns who expect payment, but it does not suggest that the world of demons is not real or that the workings of the cosmos cannot be glimpsed. On the contrary, some *kanguan* passages warn that they *are* real, “Gentle reader take note: Black magic and sorcery (*wugu mowei zhi shi* 巫蠱魔味之事) have existed since ancient times ... can the existence of such [mantic] arts be doubted?”⁴¹ But *Plum* has a complicated stance toward these practices. The narrator warns the reader about female medical practitioners, including those who prescribe demonological and herbal remedies, but it also presents mantic masters as real, even final, authorities on the course of disease. The story also relies on divination and exorcism for plot, meaning and foreshadowing.

40 The wives do this on three separate occasions: chapters 24, 44, and 45.

41 Lanling, *The Plum*, vol. 1, chap. 13, 272.

One practice in the heterodox medical tradition, “divination of the cause” (*zhuyou* 祝由), which also encompasses a prediction of the outcome of the disease, is well represented in the *Plum*. It even preserves one of the earliest accounts of a particular *zhuyou* practice in print. There are a variety of ways to divine a disease, by counting days as in Celestial Master Zhang’s (Zhang (Daoling) tianshi 張 (道陵)天師) method⁴² or others found in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century medical manuscripts like the “demon valley healing method” (*guiguzi zhibing fa* 鬼穀子治病法),⁴³ the “eight trigrams method” (*bagua* 八卦)⁴⁴ or the method to “enumerate [with combinations of heavenly stems and earthly branches] the diseases caused by demons in a sixty-day cycle” (*Huajia shuogui* 花甲說鬼).⁴⁵

Another, little known method of divining the outcome of a disease is detailed in a medical manuscript titled “Instructions on how to determine survival or death by means of emolument and horse” (*lu ma ding sheng sijue* 祿馬定生死訣).⁴⁶ The meaning of “emolument and horse” (*luma* 祿馬) has to do with official reward and fate (*luming* 祿命) following the movement of the heavenly steed (*tianma* 天馬) with a fixed regularity.⁴⁷ It is not clear when the “emolument and horse” method was first used to predict the course of an illness, but the story “Qiaoren Settles His Accounts” (“Qiaoren suanzhang 橋人算帳”) in Xu Zhen’s 徐珍 (fl. 1377) early Ming *nanxi* 南戲 drama *Shagouji* 殺狗記 (Records of killing dogs; the complete title is *Yang Dexian fu shagou quan fu* 楊德賢婦殺狗勸夫) may be the first:

On the previous day your sister-in-law was ill, and you asked me to go and consult a bamboo slip for prognosis. The Daoist said: There is a clear sign that there will be no harm. Emolument and horse are not upside down (*luma bu dao*).

42 An Eastern Han Dynasty Daoist figure credited with founding the Way of the Celestial Masters sect of Daoism.

43 Zhang Mingshi, “Jingyan fang.”

44 Wu Zaixing, “Jiutian xuannü liu ren neiyang linggua.”

45 “Duo jian er shi zhi.”

46 Found in manuscripts. See, for example, “Xiao’er gezhong jingtu”; “Yaoshu fang”; and “Zhuyou chaoben.” These sources are discussed in Unschuld and Zheng, *Chinese Traditional Healing*, 1:162–64.

47 Roel Sterckx gives an account of the history of the heavenly horse in *The Animal and the Daemon in Early China*, 184. A symbol of imperial authority since the court of Han Wudi 漢武帝 (r. 156–87 BCE) in the first century BCE, the heavenly horse could transform into other beings, particularly winged dragons, and as such featured as a standard escort in descriptions of spirit journeys and quests for immortality à la *Journey to the West*.

前日你每阿嫂有病，教我去求籤。那道人說，大像不妨，祿馬不倒。⁴⁸

Little about emolument and horse is recorded in any literature between this story and a story from Ling Mengchu's 凌濛初 (1580–1644) 1628 second collection of stories *Erke pai'an jingqi* 二刻拍案驚奇 (Slapping the table in amazement):⁴⁹

Because [Yang Wangcai 楊望才] was able to pick emolument and horse bamboo slips (*choujian luma* 抽簡祿馬) for other people, in [Si]chuan he was given the nickname Yang Horsepicker (*Yang chouma* 楊抽馬).⁵⁰

因為能與人抽簡祿馬，川中起他一個混名叫做楊抽馬。

This method of prognosis without diagnosis is seemingly quite simple in practice. Calculations are carried out on a table of four columns of ten characters each composed of alternating characters *ma* 馬 “horse” and *lu* 祿 “emoluments.” The two characters are written in three different possible positions: upright, slanted, and upside down. The doctor then counts the number of days from the beginning of the month to the date of onset, moving his finger down or up the chart depending on the month. Depending on how the character he lands on is written he is then able to predict the course of the illness. The medical manuscripts indicate that if the outcome “emolument and horse are not upside down,” (*luma budao* 祿馬不倒, the patient was expected to recover, as was recorded in *Shagou ji*. A key appended to the diagram in the medical manuscript entitled “Xiao'er gezhong jingtu 小兒各種驚圖” (“Depiction of all types of fright [conditions displayed] by children”) specifies the predictions:

When the horse stands, the person will live and can be rescued from his troubles.

When the emoluments are proper, the disease may be serious but will not harm the body.

When the horse lies in a reclined position, help will be successful.

48 Xu Zhen, *Shagou ji*, “Dishisi chu: Qiaoren suanzhang 第十四齣: 喬人算帳” [Piece number 14: The man from the bridge settles old scores], 43a. Quoted in Zheng and Unschuld, *Chinese Traditional Healing*, 1:172.

49 Ling Mengchu, *Erke pai'an jingqi*, *juan* 33, 5a, in *Guben xiaoshuo congkan*, ed. Liu Shide, vol. 14, part 14, 1609.

50 Quoted in Unschuld and Zheng, *Chinese Traditional Healing*, 1:172.

When the emoluments are slanted, a physician will be able to cure the patient.

When the horse lies upside down, the disease has an unfortunate prognosis.

When the emoluments are reversed, there is only a bleak outlook.⁵¹

This particular method of predicting the outcome of a disease is important because it is independent of the whimsy of gods, demons and ancestors, but also distinct from natural laws reflected in *yinyang* and five phases cosmology. This is essentially an individual, secular medicine that is tied to the regular occurrence of certain events. Emolument and horse is a way of revealing that regularity, but it is only a way of reading – it cannot influence events nor explain them.⁵²



FIGURE 11.3 Emolument and horse diagnostic method from Sammlung Unschuld, ms. 8472

51 Ibid., 2:1780.

52 Ibid., 1:174.

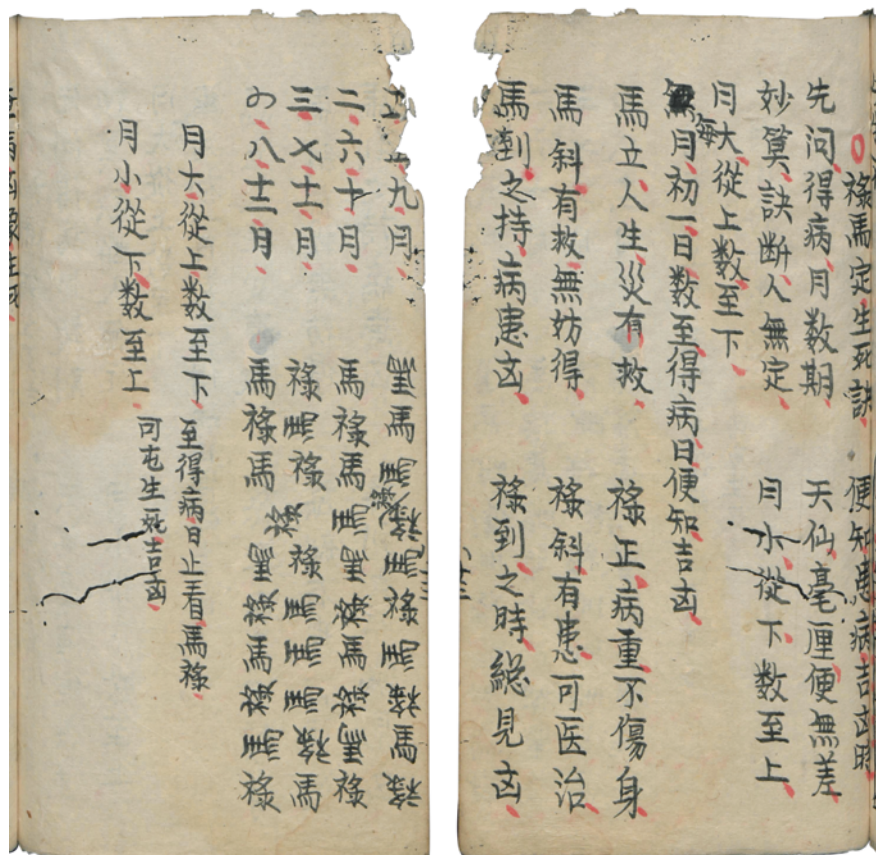


FIGURE 11.4 Handbook showing lu and ma prediction tables from republican era, Sammlung Unschuld, ms. 8439

This is precisely how the *luma* is used in *Plum*. When one of his wives, Li Ping'er 李瓶兒, is ill, Ximen Qing calls in a great number of doctors to diagnose and prescribe for her. Wu Yueniang 吳月娘 tells him,

You ought to be sparing in the medications you give her. She has already stopped eating and drinking, so what is there left in her stomach? If you insist on continuing to medicate her, it is likely to exhaust her vitality. Formerly, that Immortal Wu predicted that during her twenty-seventh year she would suffer a bloody catastrophe, and this just happens to be her twenty-seventh year. You ought to send someone to look for that

軍書起神符到中央中央百鬼走忙忙書
 下神符一道有准萬道有靈乾元亨利貞
 祿馬定死生吉凶訣
 大月從上數下
 小月從下數上
 神驗
 祿宜對馬對無祿對對馬 正五九月
 馬對對祿對對無對對祿 二六十月
 對對祿對無祿對對祿馬對對馬 三七十一月
 馬祿馬祿宜祿宜祿宜祿 四八十二月
 天生祿馬定吉凶 得病之期便須更

FIGURE 11.5 Handbook showing lu and ma prediction tables from republican era, Sammlung Unschuld 8806

Immortal Wu and have him prognosticate on her behalf to calculate if the *lu* and *ma* are up (*zhe luma shu shang* 這祿馬數上).⁵³

Emolument and horse, and the fiction that depicts that practice, was a way of ordering the chaos of contemporary medical practice. With differing doctors giving different diagnoses and prescriptions, it made sense to have a fixed way to determine the outcome of the disease, to limit the possibilities. That this practice survived as part of the doctor's repertoire into the republican era (recorded in medical manuscripts made for personal use dating from that period) speaks to the continued heterogeneity of the medical field and to the anxiety that robust systems of knowledge could provoke in patients suffering from illness. It probably did not hurt either that this was a relatively simple process. Novels like *Plum* ordered vernacular knowledge and functioned as a guidebook for those who were not sophisticated enough to practice or understand elite medicine. That the practice of prognosticating with horse and emoluments is recorded in fiction suggests something about the heterogeneity of literati practice as well. The narrator may argue against employing Buddhists and Daoists, but the author was certainly intimately familiar with these figures and their practices, along with the already copious and varied knowledge in the novel culled from elite life and literature.

Immortal Wu's visit to the Ximen household in chapter 29 (of 100 chapters in the novel) is an essential moment in the course of the story. His visit is represented in the chapter title "Immortal Wu Physiognomizes the Exalted and the Humble" ("Wu shenxian bingjian ding zhongshen 吳神仙冰鑒定終身") and its corresponding woodblock print, and he predicts (correctly, of course), the fortunes of all of the main characters. Immortal Wu is a complicated figure and can bear a great deal of scrutiny. For the most part, all prognostication in fiction is accurate, serving as foreshadowing and a reminder that individual action has little effect on the machinations of fate. Fortunes are always significant in fiction, but fortunetellers are often scorned. Yet Immortal Wu's first visit adumbrates almost the whole of the novel in certain essential points, and his image is presented as stately, mysterious, and powerful. Wu Shenxian 吳神仙, breezes in, topped with a Daoist cap of black cloth, garbed in a cotton robe and wearing grass sandals, girt in a sash of yellow silk with double tassels and grasping a tortoiseshell fan. He seems to be a bit over forty and of intelligent appearance, like the bright moon over the great river. His bearing was like that of a stately pine of Mount Hua; he was (a person) of commanding presence with the grave aspect of a scholar. As with other immortals, he was

53 Lanling, *The Plum*, 4:40; Xiaoxiao sheng, *Jinping mei cihua*, 61.25a.

possessed of four unusual attributes: a body like a (knotted) pine, a bell-like voice, a bowshaped (form) when seated, and wind-like movements. Immortal Wu was:

Master of the discriminating mirror of physiognomy (*tongfengjian*
通風鑒),
Adept at interpreting the rules of Xu Ziping [徐]子平⁵⁴
By examining celestial phenomena (*qianxiang* 乾象) he understands the
yin and yang,
By perusing the *Dragon Canon* (*longjing* 龍經) he can assess geomantic
conditions (*fengshui* 風水).⁵⁵
Profoundly conversant with the Five Planetary Features (*wuxing*
五星),⁵⁶
Deliberating to himself upon the Three Fates (*sanming mitan* 三命
秘談);⁵⁷
By scrutinizing the astrological circumstances (*geju* 格局),
He can determine the success or failure of a lifetime (*yishi zhi rongku*
一世之榮枯);
By observing the humor and the complexion (*qise* 氣色),
He can decide the good or evil of one's allotted years (*xingnian zhi xiujiu*
行年之休咎).
If he is not Chen Tuan 陳搏 the realized adept who sojourned on Mount
Hua (*Huayue xiu zhen ke* 華岳修真客)⁵⁸
He must be Yan Junping 嚴君平, who sold fortunes in the market of
Chengdu (*Chengdu maiburen* 成都賣蔔人).⁵⁹

54 The method of fortune-telling on the basis of the "eight characters" that determine one's horoscope. It is traditionally attributed to a shadowy figure named Xu Ziping who is said to have lived during the tenth century.

55 The *Dragon Canon* is an abbreviated reference to several works on geomancy that contain this term in their titles and that are doubtfully attributed to Yang Yunsong 楊筠松 (late ninth century).

56 The Five Planetary Features is a term used by physiognomists who correlate the five planets – Mars, Saturn, Jupiter, Venus, and Mercury – with the five phases – fire, earth, wood, metal, and water – and with the forehead, nose, right ear, left ear, and mouth.

57 The Three Fates is a Han dynasty concept that divided human fate into three categories that might be translated as Allotted Fate, Deserved Fate, and Contingent Fate.

58 Chen Tuan (895–989) is a historical figure who played a significant role in Chinese philosophy but has also become a magus figure in popular lore, associated with numerology, physiognomy, and other mantic arts. For his biography, see *Song shi* 宋史 (History of the Song [Dynasty]), vol. 38, *juan* 457.

59 Xiaoxiao sheng, *Jin ping mei cihua*, 29.4b. Yan Junping (fl. first century BCE) is a historical figure who made his living by fortune-telling in the market of Chengdu but closed his

Immortal Wu was sent by an official colleague to Ximen's house, so he is obliged to invite him in and allow him to ply his trade. Before doing so, he inquires which schools of *yinyang* and which varieties of physiognomy Wu practices. Wu replies,

I am roughly familiar with all thirteen schools of Xu Ziping's method, I am thoroughly conversant with the *mayi xiangfa* 麻衣相法 (the physiognomic technique of the Hemp-robed Master),⁶⁰ and equally so with the divine oracles generated by the six recurrences of the *ren* stem in the sexagenary cycle (*liuren shenke* 六壬神課). I constantly distribute medicine in order to cure people. Having no love of mundane wealth, I conform to the times and take the world as I find it.⁶¹

Initially hesitant, Ximen is now impressed by the discourse and demeanor of the diviner, and has him predict his future first from the date and time of his birth (which Immortal Wu silently calculates on his fingers) and then from the features of his face. He then predicts the fates of Ximen's primary wives using physiognomy. Although the fortune-telling jargon employed here and elsewhere in the novel is quite authentic, the horoscopes provided for the characters are calendrically impossible, which suggests that the author did not intend his readers to take them too seriously.⁶² Readers with a rudimentary knowledge of the calendrical system would likely have noticed this, as did the anonymous commentator on the Chongzhen 崇禎 edition of the novel, who pointed this out in an upper margin comment at this point in the text ("These 'four pillars' are entirely out of keeping with Song [dynasty] fate calculation" [四柱俱不合想宋時算命如此]). It is a mystery why the author would have employed accurate lexicon but absurd math in his representation of diviners predicting fortunes that come true. Is it a kind of code? Is it a desire to disparage the practice or profession? The author is familiar enough with the practices and

door every day as soon as he had earned his sustenance and devoted himself to giving instruction in Taoism. He is reputed to have been the teacher of the famous Confucian scholar Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE). For his biography, see *Hanshu* 漢書 (Book of the Han), vol. 7, *juan* 72.

60 The Hemp-robed Master is the name of a shadowy figure who was allegedly an older contemporary of Chen Tuan (895–989) and who is popularly believed to have been a master of physiognomy.

61 Lanling, *The Plum*, 2:172.

62 Paul Varo Martinson considers why the author would place such conspicuously erroneous calendrical calculations into the mouth of an otherwise presentable and precise diviner in his dissertation "Pao Order and Redemption."

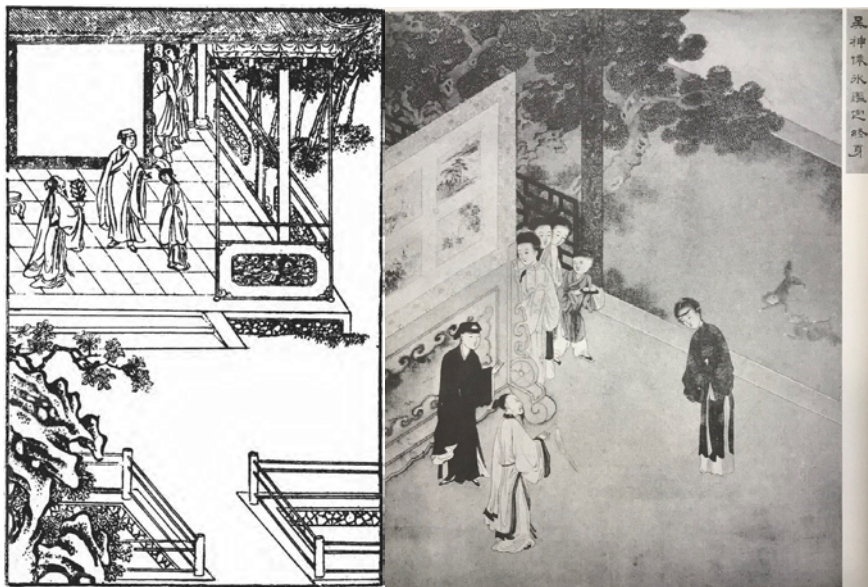


FIGURE 11.6 Immortal Wu Physiognomizes the Exalted and Humble
 IMAGE FROM *GAOHE TANG PIPING DIYI QI SHU JIN PING MEI*, 皋鶴堂批評第一奇書金瓶梅 (1695), CHAPTER 29, COURTESY WASEDA UNIVERSITY (LIBRARY CALL NUMBER 21 03765).

theories and could have easily looked up the correct dates in an almanac, so why signal to the reader that the fortune-tellers are anything less than reliable? Perhaps the math is off out of respect to living people, readers, who might have stems and branches in their own horoscopes identical to *Plum's* meager-fated characters. Perhaps it was simply the author copying out of an almanac (*rishu* 日書, *lipu* 曆譜, *lishu* 曆書, *tongshu* 通書), divinatory manual or daily-use encyclopedia (*riyong leishu* 日用類書, often with the term *wanbao quanshu* 萬寶全書 in the title), all of which began to circulate in huge quantities at the same moment that vernacular novels became immensely popular.⁶³

63 Daily-use encyclopediae usually had twenty or thirty chapters devoted to medicine, culture, practical arts like agriculture or carpentry, and to divination. Many included all, and all included some of the following chapters that provided guidance on how to perform different methods of divination: "Choosing days" (*zeri* 擇日), "Fate Calculation" (*zhanwu* 占巫, *buke* 卜課, *buyuan* 卜員, *zhanke* 占課), "Interpretation of dreams" (*mengjie* 夢解), "Fate calculation from the stars" (*xingming* 星命), "Physiognomy" (*xiangfa* 相法), "Statutory diseases" (*fabing* 法病, *qubing* 祛病).

Not only are all of the fortune-tellers in *Plum* perfectly correct in all of their predictions, but historical fiction is always prognosticatory, since the reader knows how it all ends. In the case of *Plum*, dangers invited by its Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) social and political critique are obfuscated by its Song Dynasty setting. And yet that time period, the years leading up to the invasion and collapse of the Northern Song (960–1127), are implicitly part of the contemporary critique of the Ming court, which even casual readers would have noticed. The collapse of the dynasty foretells the collapse of the Ximen household (and, not incidentally, also foretells the collapse of the Ming Dynasty, an event thirty years in the future). *Plum*'s setting is also doubly indebted to the past, and beholden to its course, since it expands into 80 chapters an episode that happens in chapters 23–26 of *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (Outlaws of the marsh). Readers know that historically the Northern Song falls, and that in literary history, Ximen Qing and Pan Jinlian 潘金蓮 are killed by Wu Song 武松. Thus, when Immortal Wu predicts that Jinlian is inclined to wantonness and assured of a premature death, readers know he is trustworthy.

The wives and concubines have their fortunes told again in chapter 46, when, out of boredom and whimsy, they invite in an itinerant woman who is capable of divining with the “tortoise oracle” (*linggui* 靈龜). She is unnamed – an “old country woman who made her living telling fortunes by means of the tortoise oracle and trigrams” (*xiang li bo gui'er gua'er de laopozi* 鄉裡蔔龜兒卦兒的老婆子), and unlike the finery of Immortal Wu, she is wearing a simple blue cotton skirt and patchwork jacket.⁶⁴ The woman asks the years of their birth, each in turn, and then gives the tortoise oracle a toss (*yi zhi* 一擲, in later divinations, it is a spin, *bu zhuan gui'er* 蔔轉龜兒). For each woman, the tortoise (shell?) lands on an image on her board (portrayed as a circle below), each of the images bears the name of one of the “twelve palaces” found on the face, according to some schools of physiognomy, the “palace of fate” (*ming-gong* 命宮), “palace of illness and adversity” (*ji'egong* 疾厄宮), and the “palace of sons and daughters” (*ernügong* 兒女宮). Her predictions tally with those of Immortal Wu (which also combine physiognomy with other divinatory strategies), simultaneously justifying both methods of divination and establishing the predictions as verified evidence.

Plum takes a complicated stance toward prognostication. While it foreshadows the various fates of the primary characters via fortune-telling, it repeatedly speaks directly to the reader about the immutability of fate:

64 Lanling, *The Plum*, 122, with emendations.

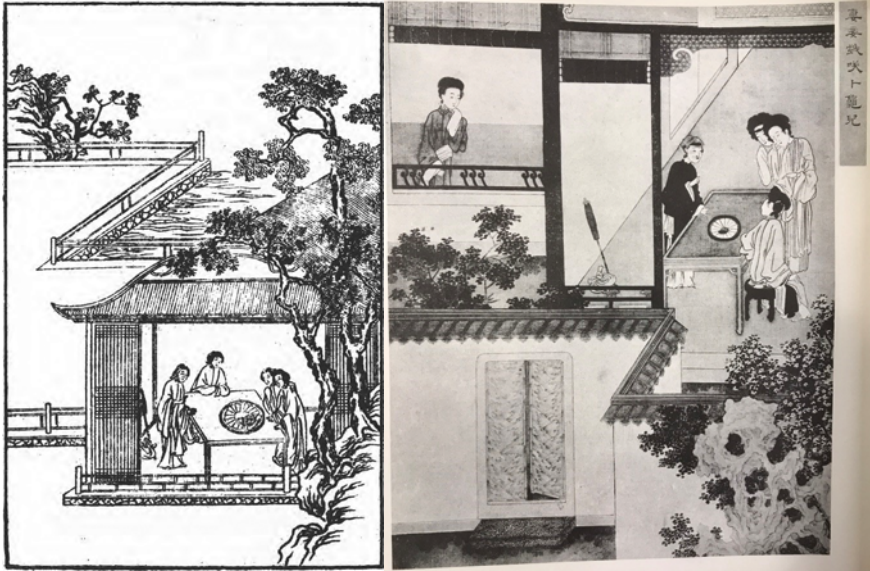


FIGURE 11.7 Wife and concubines laughingly consult the tortoise oracle (*qiqie xixiao bo gu'er* 妻妾戲笑筊龜兒)

IMAGE FROM GAOHE TANG PIPING DIYI QI SHU JIN PING MEI 皋鶴堂批評第一奇書金瓶梅 (1695), CHAP. 46, COURTESY WASEDA UNIVERSITY (LIBRARY CALL NUMBER 21 03765)

Truly:

The myriad affairs are things that one cannot argue with;
One's whole life is entirely determined by one's destiny.⁶⁵

There is a poem that testifies to this:

Gan Luo's 甘羅 success came early, while [Jiang] Ziya's 子牙 came late;
Peng Zu 彭祖 and Yan Hui 顏回 attained longevities of differing length.
Fan Dan 范單 was impoverished, while Shi Chong 石崇 was a rich man;
However calculated, the differences were only in the timing.⁶⁶

65 This phrase (萬事不由人計較，一生都是命安排) is ubiquitous in vernacular Chinese literature.

66 Lanling, *The Plum*, 46:128. This poem, or other versions of it, also occur in the *Shuihu zhuan*. Yan Hui and Shi Chong, mentioned in the poem, are also characters featured in the legend of Fan Dan, in which Confucius sends Yan Hui to borrow some grain, and before he lends it, he asks difficult philosophical questions. Yan Hui's answers, which please Fan Dan, are about the evils of money and the scarcity of upright people.

Fortune-telling in *Plum* is accurate, but futile, given the narrative's fatalistic attitude toward destiny. However, to mention Fan Dan 範單 (aka Fan Ran 范冉, 112–85) here, a man who chose to endure a life of poverty and support himself by fortune-telling rather than compromising his integrity by going along with the corrupt-values of his time, the narrative seems to valorize lesser trades, especially in the face of the official corruption and personal decadence consistently and mercilessly decried in the novel.⁶⁷

Understanding *Plum's* attitude toward fortune-telling is further complicated by Pan Jinlian, who is late to the gathering and does not have her fate predicated by the divine tortoise. When she is told that she has missed her chance, she remarks that on the previous occasion, when “the Daoist practitioner was physiognomizing us and said that I would suffer a premature death (*duanming* 短命). Who needs it? It only serves to make one depressed (*shuo de ren xinli yingying de* 說的人心裡影影的). What will be, will be.” She repeats that fortune-telling is not for her (*wo shi bu bo ta* 我是不蔔他) and then cites the common phrase, “You may predict a person's fate, but you can't predict his conduct” (*suan de zhu ming, suan bu zhu xing* 算的著命，算不著行).⁶⁸ This is the idea that resolves the tension between the narrative's insistence on destiny, the story's characters who either do not believe in fate or prognostication, and the story's plot, the very length of the novel, which would not exist if the reader were simply to accept foreknowledge of characters' ends as fact.

While prognostications in *Plum* are accurate, particularly in the case of Jinlian, whom the reader knows is doomed from sources outside of the novel, they are not undisputed. All of the characters who have died over the course of the novel reappear, in ghostly form, in the last chapter to report on the cause of their deaths and the manner of their reincarnation. One of the primary themes of *Plum* is retribution, and those who are conniving and licentious die early deaths, while the more pious characters live quite long. The Chan master Pu Jing 普靜 recites a spell to dispel enmity, and the ghosts appear to him. One of the primary female characters, Li Ping'er, says that she died from a case of acute metrorrhagia (*hai xueshanbeng er si* 害血山崩而死). Some events corroborate this diagnosis. She suffered from long-term uterine bleeding after giving birth to her son, unadvisedly had intercourse with Ximen while menstruating, which led to semen entering her blood, and was harangued incessantly by Jinlian after the death of her infant son. Yet, characters' accounts of their own deaths are somewhat at odds with the narrative. In the case of Li Ping'er, the reader knows that she had an affair with Ximen Qing, stole her

67 *Houhanshu* 後漢書 (Book of the Later Han), vol. 83.

68 Lanling, *The Plum*, 3:147.

husband's money and caused him to die of anger and desperation, transgressions for which they might expect her to invite retributory punishment. Her former husband appears to her repeatedly in her dreams, holding her son and demanding that she join them in the underworld, and when she does not he lodges a case against her.⁶⁹ When Ping'er is on her deathbed, all manner of healers are brought in. Doctors prescribe a number of medicines, but her symptoms only worsen. The feeling of urgency increases and Ximen sends for supramundane healers. Fortune-teller Huang 黃 predicts an ominous fortune for Li Ping'er. One of her sister wives points out that Immortal Wu predicted that Li Ping'er would meet with difficulties at the age of twenty-seven, her present age. They search for Divine Immortal Wu to update his prediction, but he has left the area. Daoist Priest Pan arrives arrayed in finery. Through ceremonial and ritual performances he determines that Li Ping'er committed a serious offense in a former life and that a complaint has been lodged against her with the officials of the netherworld. He further states that her current illness is not the result of some malevolent possession that can be exorcized. She is bound to die, and Priest Pan declares that he is incapable of successfully intervening on her behalf.⁷⁰

What are readers to make of her own claim, in the last chapter of the novel, as a ghost, that she died of blood loss? She knows her crimes (at least the ones committed in this life) and she has dreamt of her former husband accusing her of them. These karmically retributory (previous life), or distally retributory (murdered husband's revenge) explanations seem to hold more authority than proximal retribution (blood loss for lasciviousness), yet the revenant must know how she *truly* died. Pan Jinlian's claim that you can predict a person's fate but you cannot predict his actions is a key to explaining this case. Li Ping'er's fortune is contingent. As the tortoise diviner says to her, "This year the planet Jidu⁷¹ impinges on your fate, meaning that you may suffer a bloody catastrophe (*xueguang zhi zai* 血光之災). Only if you can avoid hearing the sound of weeping in the seventh and eighth months, will you be all right."⁷² This is a contingent fortune that takes the "only if you ... then" form. Fate makes room

69 Lanling, *The Plum*, 4:63. Elsewhere, I have referred to these as proximal, distal and ultimate causes of death. See Schonebaum, *Novel Medicine*.

70 Daoist Priest Pan visits and performs the ceremony in chapter 62.

71 Jidu (計都星, Sanskrit: Ketu) is the name of one of two imaginary "dark stars," or invisible planets (the other being *luohou* 羅喉, Sanskrit: Rahu), introduced into China during the Tang dynasty through the translation of works on Indian astronomy, as part of a theory to account for lunar eclipses. In Chinese astrology and fortune-telling, it was regarded as a baleful influence presaging disaster.

72 Lanling, *The Plum*, 3:127, with emendations.

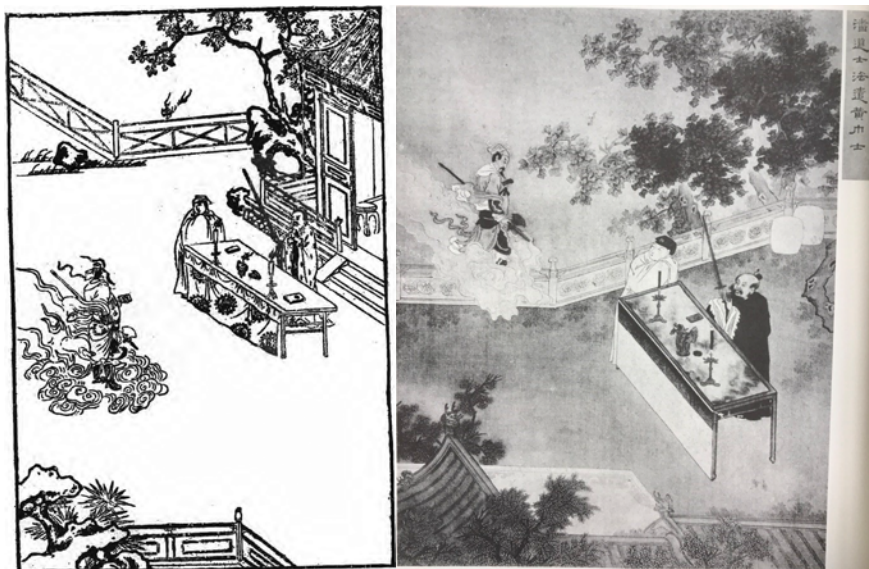


FIGURE 11.8 Daoist Master Pan conjures up a Yellow-turbaned Warrior (*Pan daoshi faqian Huangjinshi* 潘道士法遣黃巾士)

IMAGE FROM GAOHE TANG PIPING DIYI QI SHU JIN PING MEI 皋鶴堂批評第一奇書金瓶梅 (1695), CHAP. 62, COURTESY WASEDA UNIVERSITY (LIBRARY CALL NUMBER 21 03765)

for behavior. Yet because Jinlian is determined to make Li Ping'er miserable, there is much weeping in the household, and Li Ping'er is not able to escape her bloody catastrophe. Most of the prognostications in *Plum* are contingent on human action, and many are specific about time but vague about mechanism of fate. Li Ping'er is predicted to suffer a calamity in her 27th year, for instance, which allows for the future to be in motion, for Ping'er to change her fate enough to survive it (though inevitably, none of the wives do).

Ximen Qing repeats the prior claim "One can calculate fate; but one cannot calculate behavior." And he continues by saying "The physiognomic marks, following the heart (i.e., internal conditions), are produced; the physiognomic marks, according with the heart, disappear."⁷³ Significantly, this latter quote repeats what Immortal Wu himself had said to explain physiognomy, "As for

73 Lanling, *The Plum*, 2:185; Xiaoxiao sheng, *Jin ping mei cihua*, chap. 29, 10b (自古算的着命, 算不着好。相逐心生, 相隨心滅). Some translators (Martinson and Roy) read *xing* 行 for *hao* 好, since this is what Pan Jinlian says of prognostication later in chapter 46. Immortal Wu has already said the second couplet ("likeness") earlier in this same chapter.

physiognomic marks, there are those who have the heart without the marks. In this case the marks, following the heart, are produced. There are those who have the marks without the heart. In this case the marks, according with the heart, depart.”⁷⁴ Which is to say that physiognomic features are not physical markers of an immutable fate, but both physical features and the fate they point to change with behavior and intention.

The novel via the media of poems, sayings and asides, often gives the reader to believe that all is disposed by Heaven and there is nothing to do for it but accept the inevitabilities of change and fate. But this is not reflected in any of the attitudes of the characters. None shows a profound belief in fate or fate calculation, but only differing degrees of skepticism. This is the conviction that primacy goes to behavior rather than fate, and to heart rather than outward physiognomic marks. That each character fulfils their destiny, no matter how meager, is a testament to their normalcy, their unremarkable willpower, and the willful ignorance of characters in ignoring prescient warnings. They are, essentially, poor readers of their own lives.

If divining the outcome of illness is prognosis without diagnosis, in the novel it helps to reveal much about characters, given the strong, recurring motif of retribution in *Plum*.⁷⁵ If a character dies from an illness that they have a chance, according to the mantic tables or Yinyang master Xu's “little black book” (*heishu* 黑書), to survive, the reader can judge the relative strength or weakness of their fate, or the tolerance of their fate for immoral or unwise acts. It is, basically, an indication of the severity of their actions and the degree to which they have “tempted fate.” This kind of prognostication is very similar to that other kind of “gentle reader” (*kanguan*) passage, which points the reader not to truths they should glean from fiction, but how to perceive its complexity, relationships and morality. Moreover, “divination of cause” in life essentially reads the relative strength of fate, and in fiction, particularly simple practices like “emolument and horse” (*luma*), read it for the reader.

“Emolument and horse” is a divinatory practice I have only come across in two kinds of texts, Ming entertainment literature (*xiaoshuo* 小說) and handwritten (or hand-copied) medical manuscripts from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Elsewhere I have shown how medical and fictional knowledge entwined, how these medical manuscripts quoted passages from *xiaoshuo* or drama as evidence of the real, curative properties of a medicine.⁷⁶ It may not be so surprising then, that these two kinds of texts, the writers of

74 Lanling, *The Plum*, 2:213. These words are traditionally attributed to Chen Tuan.

75 See Martinson, “Pao Order and Redemption,” 59–219.

76 Schonebaum, *Novel Medicine*, chapters 1 and 2.

which clearly read very broadly and did not view harsh distinctions between the logic of fiction and verifiable truth, are the only instances I have found that record this particular divinatory practice.

Divinatory practices often mirrored medical practice, and practitioners frequently performed both forms of diagnosis and prognosis. Physiognomy, for instance, closely resembled doctors' practice, especially the lesser or lost arts of looking, listening, asking and touching. The hundreds of life stories collected in Yuan Shushan's 袁樹珊 (1881–1968) *Zhongguo lidai buren zhuan* 中國歷代卜人傳 (Biographies of diviners in China by dynastic periods; 1948) testify to the central role divination played in nearly all aspects of Chinese life, and at least 170 of Yuan Shushan's 1,115 biographical entries refer to individuals who practiced both medicine and divination (*yibu* 醫卜).⁷⁷ Physiognomers, like doctors, trained in the classical diagnostic principles (looking, listening, asking and feeling [the pulse]) focused on external signs: a client's facial expression, posture, speech, responsiveness, clarity of eyes and thought. Like doctors, physiognomers paid close attention to complexion (*qise* 氣色). According to the Ming handbook of physiognomy, the *Shenxiang quanbian* 神相全編 (Complete guide to spirit physiognomy; ca.1400) facial colors not only indicated different kinds of personalities, they also suggested certain kinds of fate. A healthy face was a lucky face. A red complexion suggested excessive heat, while a white complexion indicated deficiencies of blood and *qi*.⁷⁸ Some medical texts, like the *Taisu mofa* 太素脈法 (Elementary pulse-reading methods; 1722) demonstrate that the orthodox method of medical diagnosis could also be used to determine good or bad fortune, high or low status, blessings or calamities.⁷⁹ In addition to diagnostic approaches, both shared prescriptive approaches undergirded by theories of "retributory correspondence" (*ying* 應 or *xiangying* 相應) which involved considerations of time, place and demonology, as well as notions of physiology and personality.⁸⁰ Practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine and divination often considered a patient's moral behavior to be a significant factor in that person's wellbeing, and illness. Clients of both doctors and diviners were therefore advised to cultivate good thoughts and to banish selfish desires.

Illness can obfuscate fate in a way that hauntings and other retributory agents do not. Famously, Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 seems to have been "commanded"

77 Smith, "Divination," 1520.

78 Kohn, "A Textbook of Physiognomy," 248; and Kuriyama, *The Expressiveness of the Body*, chap. 4.

79 Smith, *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers*, 194.

80 Modified from Smith's translation in his "Divination," 1520.

by one of his early readers to change the death of a beloved character from suicide (as depicted in a prognostic dream) to a consumptive wasting and bleeding illness (*laozhai* 癆瘵) because it was less starkly retribution for her transgression of having an incestuous affair with her father-in-law.⁸¹ But the demands of realistic fiction complicate diagnosis and prognosis. Divining fortune presents a problem in a novel that is fundamentally about retribution. Many readers struggle to make sense of *Plum*'s last chapter, in which we learn the status of all of the main characters in their subsequent incarnations. Most are happily reincarnated into well-to-do families, and thus the Chan master Pujing is seen as a figure of redemption. Yet, he also has made a deal to adopt as his acolyte the only remaining son of Ximen Qing, thereby extinguishing the Ximen line, the ultimate retribution for wrongdoing. Is the novel then, ultimately, about Buddhist salvation or Confucian retribution? Another possibility is that it is about the difficulty to adapt to the vicissitudes of life and even harder to avoid your fate.

Jinlian and Ximen Qing do little to redeem themselves in life, and learning their fates from the diviner does little or nothing to alter their behavior. The case of Li Ping'er though illustrates how the reader could have sympathy for a character who has accrued so much bad karma. No less than four divinatory characters correctly predict her meager fate. Yet her story ameliorates the weight of her moral transgressions by focusing not on her guilt, the proximal, distal and ultimate retribution owed to her for her actions, but rather on her inability to avoid the fate incurred by them. Despite her early wrongdoings, once she is brought into the Ximen household, she is generous with her wealth and thoughtful of her sister wives. She tries to mediate disputes. Li Ping'er is the victim of Pan Jinlian's schemes to cause her misery. That misery usually takes the form of weeping – one of Jinlian's maids who she has beaten savagely or by scaring or startling Ping'er's infant son so that he cries. Hence, she cannot avoid but hear the sound of weeping, which would be the only way to avoid her "bloody disaster" as predicted by the tortoise oracle. Jinlian becomes an agent of her fate, true, but Ping'er did not give enough weight to her fortune. She was essentially a bad reader of her own life, and fortune-tellers act as commentary

81 Cao, *Honglou meng*, chap. 12. In 1959 a manuscript edition of *Honglou meng* from the Qianlong era, now known as the Jing 靖 edition, appeared in Nanjing before being reported lost again in 1964. It included an annotation, which confirmed that not only had Cao Xueqin been ordered to cut the story of Keqing's suicide and replace it with her death from a wasting illness, but also that the person who gave this instruction was Odd Tablet (Jihu sou 畸笏叟), an early manuscript commentator, who claimed intimate knowledge of Cao Xueqin.

on that life – pointing out important plot points, judging the moral strengths and failings of the characters.

In addition to the commentary functions of divination in fiction, there is still more that can be learned from the confluence of mantic arts and fictional representation. Perhaps most important is the matter of gender distinctions. In the case of *Plum*, all of the characters are more inclined to trust male fortunetellers than female ones, unlike the gendered preference for same-sex medical practitioners. The woman fortuneteller, while equally precise in her prognostications, practices a more marginal form of divination, as opposed to the more common methods of physiognomy and calendrical fate-calculation used by the men. Fate is predicted in *Plum* when a character is deathly ill, and it is of dire importance to know whether they will live or die (prognosis as diagnosis as in the phrase from *Stone* “you can cure illness, but you can’t cure fate” [*zhiliao bing zhibude ming* 治了病治不得命]), and in these instances, a male fortuneteller is called to the house. Characters in *Plum* and other fictional works also consult fortunetellers on a lark, a chance encounter, or in the case of *Plum*, when they pass by the house, and there is nothing else to occupy their time. Very often, divination occurs in fiction as a game to the characters, a whimsical diversion from boredom, but then inevitably it foreshadows something grave. When created as a game, the divinatory texts are like other omens: a kite breaking its string, a series of joyful riddles that coincidentally all feature images of loss and grief, a sound like mourning coming from the ancestral hall, a tree blooming out of season – in that they only have meaning to those who notice them, and when that happens it is always alienating, and sad.

Fictional practitioners usually do not go into detail about why they practice one method of divination over another, or even why there are multiple kinds of divination. Presumably each divinatory method accesses the same cosmic information, so why is there a need to have more than one method? We see in *Plum* that the *ziping* method provides more detail about the future than does the *mayi* method, whereas “emolument and horse” seems to be primarily a yes/no answer to a question. Undoubtedly it would tell us something about the author to note which practices are mentioned, or esteemed, and which are denigrated, omitted or not known.

Some scholars believe that *Plum* posits a strong Confucian moral – the Ximen line is destroyed – the most comprehensive failure from that perspective. Others believe that such a reading ignores the explicit redemption from resentment provided the characters in the last chapter. One of the most notable arguments for the authorship of the novel and its overall vision has been made by David Tod Roy, the translator of *Plum* in his introduction to volume one. In it, Roy makes strong arguments that the anonymous author of the work

affiliated himself with the philosopher Xunzi 荀子. He called himself “the scoffing scholar of Lanling” (Lanling xiaoxiao sheng 蘭陵笑笑生). Since there is no substantial use of dialect peculiar to Shandong in the novel, and some indication that the author was not particularly familiar with customs local to Shandong, Roy feels that Lanling does not refer to the author’s own place of origin or home. Rather, he thinks it is a reference to the place where, we are told in his biography in the *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the historian), Xunzi held the post of magistrate, where he lived after he held that post, and where he is buried. Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145?–86? BCE) writes of him that, “Xunzi hated the corrupt governments of his day, the decadent states and evil princes who did not follow the way but gave their attention to magic and prayers and believed in omens and luck.”⁸² Roy argues that Xunzi’s philosophy, the most famous tenant of which is the notion that, although everyone has the capacity for goodness, human nature is basically evil and, if allowed to find expression without the conscious molding and restraint of ritual, is certain to lead the individual disastrously astray – lies at the heart of the novel. He writes “That the implied author of the *Jin ping mei* endorses this view should be apparent to even the most superficial reader, but he also makes it quite explicit by quoting in four different places in his novel, including the first chapter, a line that reads ‘In this world the heart of man alone remains vile.’”⁸³ Roy goes on to make a strong argument that the author of *Plum* was an adherent of Xunzi’s philosophy in its entirety. But the novel’s detailed descriptions of mantic arts, the invocation of spirits, and the various accurate prognostications of fortune and disaster, at least argue against a *complete* adherence to Xunzi’s beliefs.

Xunzi’s work contains an entire chapter entitled “Against Physiognomy” (“Fei xiang 非相”), and he remarks elsewhere in the book attributed to him, “One performs the rain sacrifice and it rains. Why? I say, there is no special reason why. It is the same as when one does not perform the rain sacrifice and it rains anyway.... One performs divination and only then decides on important affairs. But this is not to be regarded as bringing one what one seeks, but rather is done to give things proper form. Thus the gentleman regards this as proper form, but the common people regard it as connecting with sprits.”⁸⁴ Xunzi concludes this thought by saying that “if one regards it as proper form, one will have good fortune. If one regards it as connecting with spirits, one will have

82 Sima Qian, *Shiji*, vol. 7, *juan* 74, 2348. (荀卿嫉濁世之政，亡國亂君相屬，不遂大道而營於巫祝，信機祥。) Translation adapted from Sima Qian, *Records of the Historian*, 74.

83 Roy, “Introduction,” xxv.

84 Xunzi, *Xunzi*, bk. 17, 179.

misfortune.” He acknowledges that it is fitting and proper to perform mantic arts, particularly at court, and particularly by those whose job it is to perform them. He writes, “The work of the hunchbacked shamans and lame-footed seers is to assess the yin and the yang, to divine the omens and portents, to drill the tortoise-shells and lay out the hexagrams, to preside over ceremonies for warding off ills, selecting lucky days and the five prognostications, and to know good and bad fortune, the auspicious and the inauspicious.”⁸⁵ For Xunzi, there is good and bad luck, but they are courted by proper ritual action, good form and behavior.

How is the reader to make sense of these views vis-a-vis *Plum*? On the one hand, the narrator and the story clearly criticize these characters for their behavior, and by extension, late-Ming society and the court for the same, self-ish, decadent stances that cause so much resentment in the world. The characters presented in *Plum* are squarely middlebrow – marginally literate, nouveau riche, social climbers – perhaps not the “common people” Xunzi refers to in his remarks, but certainly less wise than Confucian scholars and officials. But if fortunetelling is used in *Plum* (as in all fiction) as a literary device (foreshadowing) and to begin a conversation about fate, human nature and individual agency, ghosts are decidedly real. “Real” ghosts and spirits may still serve as metaphors, for the “hauntings” of guilt, a lustful heart or the like, but they also *really* appear to characters, engaging them in conversation, or in sexual intercourse that saps their vitality. In fiction, communication with ghosts often occurs in dreams, which raises the possibility that it is imagined contact, but in *Plum*’s final chapter, a parade of the dead main characters appears before multiple witnesses, and each ghost explains their deaths and the circumstances of their rebirths. Moreover, in chapter 62 a Daoist priest summons a divine Marshall who is on duty that day to inquire if there are supernatural forces at work in one of Ximen Qing’s wives’ illness.⁸⁶ A genie-like Daoist deity that takes human form and serves its summoner also occurs in the work of Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123–1202), and other fictional works like *Xingshi hengyan* 醒世恆言 (Stories to awaken the world), *Yuanqu xuan waibian* 元曲選外編 (Additional selected works of Yuan Qu) and *Shuihu quan zhuan* 水滸全傳 (The complete outlaws of the marsh). So, it could be that the author was more casually borrowing from other literature, yet he takes pains to describe the deity in detail, and to have him report to the Daoist in the presence of Ximen Qing, which makes the Marshall seem both original to the novel and real to the characters

85 Ibid., bk. 9, 78. (相陰陽，占祲兆，鑽龜陳卦，主攘擇五卜，知其吉凶妖祥，僞巫跛擊之事也。)

86 Lanling, *The Plum*, chap. 62, 62–63.

in it. *Plum* is a work of such sophistication that it would be obtuse to assert that it cannot contain contradictory or complicated attitudes toward divination, and toward Xunzi (or some similar moral vision), but it does impugn the assertion that the author followed or asserted the views of Xunzi wholesale. It seems from the above comments too, that Xunzi acknowledged divination as a fact of life, and courting fortune as an unescapable paradigm for high and low alike.

One kind of text on which *Plum* and other novels drew extensively, which discussed ghosts and demons in detail, were daily-use encyclopedias. Often, these encyclopedias would have a chapter devoted to “medical learning” (*yixue* 醫學) that listed common ailments, prescriptions and mnemonics to remember them, and one on “expelling disease” (*qubing* 祛病) that listed talismans or character amulets (*ziyuan* 字元, *shufu* 書符), instructions on how to predict the course of an illness, and incantations to chant while administering medicine. Much of the information contained in these encyclopedias were copied by those making medical manuscripts in the late Qing. For instance, two manuscripts from the late Qing and early republican era, include “Celestial Master Zhang’s method to expel diseases” (*Zhang tianshi qubing fufa* 張天師祛病符法), which correlates illnesses to specific demons based on which day the illness was contracted in a 30 day cycle.⁸⁷ Patients acquire different diseases on different days because they have been cursed by demons located in different directions. The demons associated with each day have specific family names and a particular physical appearance, though they are invisible. Most resemble animals and cause disease related in some way to that animal. Treatments often take the form of removing the object on which the demon is perching, or offering cash to the corresponding demon and direction. For example:

If someone falls ill on the first day of the month, he has acquired this on the road in the Southeast. The tree spirits have settled [in that person], the death spirit has caused a disease. Take five sheets of yellow paper [money] and send them to the Southeast. This will bring the cure. If someone falls ill on the second day of the month, he has acquired this in the Southeast. The old demon of a relative has issued a curse. Take five sheets of white paper and send them to the Southeast. This will bring the cure.... If someone falls ill on the eleventh day of the month, he has acquired this exactly in the North. A demon of a woman who died an

87 “Zhang Tianshi qubing fufa.” The medical manuscript “Duojian er shi zhi” has the same talismans though with simpler explanations, and lacks the title.

unjust death has issued a curse. Take five sheets of paper [money] and send them directly to the North. This will bring the cure.⁸⁸

Many encyclopediae, including Yu Xiangdou's 餘象鬥 *Santai wanyong zheng-zong* 三台萬用正宗 (Santai's orthodox instructions), dating from the first years of the seventeenth century, have the exact same set of talismans, though they are titled "Celestial Master Zhang's *secret writings* to expel diseases" (*Zhang tianshi qubing mishu* 張天師祛病秘書), and give somewhat different explanations about which demons were causing the disease and how to pacify them. Traditional almanacs, like the *Yuxiaji* 玉匣記 (The jade box) from the last years of the Qing contain almost exactly the same talismans and explanations.⁸⁹ From the late Ming to the republican period, literate medical practitioners were consulting encyclopediae and almanacs and incorporating their varied strata of knowledge into their therapeutic regimens.

If the medicine of systematic correspondence found disease etiology primarily in changes in the weather and extremes of emotion, apotropaic medicine found them in demons, ghosts, haunting souls or local gods. At times this simply meant accidentally running into one of them, as with Celestial Master Zhang's talismans above. Some texts discuss ethical weakness that invites demons, attribute demonic invasion to physical weakness. Others make it clear that apotropaic medicine is based on the presumption that the patient has encountered a demon or spirit out of place, or that the patient was himself out of place. One medical manuscript discusses the movement of the fetus spirit (*taishen* 胎神):

In a household, in locations like the cooking stove, the rooftop, or the doors, if one carries out some repair work on the day the fetus spirit happens to reside just there, this will be an offense inevitably leading to severe pain in the woman's abdomen, causing labor and [premature] delivery. This is called 'to kill the fetus', *shatai* 殺胎.⁹⁰

88 Contained in the medical manuscript "Duojian er shi zhi" in a section titled *Huajia shuogui milu* 花甲說鬼秘錄 (Secret records of sixty demons). Quoted in Unschuld and Zheng, *Chinese Traditional Healing*, 1163.

89 The *Yuxiaji* is quoted in *The Story of the Stone*, chap. 42. Xifeng wants to know the origin of Grandmother Jia's illness, and has a servant read her the relevant passage. It reads: "Eighth Month. Twenty-Fifth Day: Sicknesses occurring on this day have a south-easterly origin. Possible cause Encounter with spirit of hanged person or flower spirit. Recommended action Maximum benefit may be obtained by procuring voluntary departure of spirit. To do this, take forty pieces of colored paper 'spirit money' and walk forty paces in a south-easterly direction offering one of the pieces at every step" (*The Story of the Stone*, 2:403).

90 Unschuld and Zheng, *Chinese Traditional Healing*, 165.

The unfortunate crossing of paths – the fetus spirit moving around the house, or souls that need to be called back after escaping from fright or possession, suggest an anxiety about place. Illness also came from vengeful ancestors who could not be suaded or placated with the usual methods. Very old terms like “returning to kill” (*guisha* 歸殺, or 歸煞) in which family members fled the house in which a relative died and employed talismans because the deceased’s avenging soul would return and infect or kill anyone who remained inside were criticized as late as the 1930s.⁹¹ A similar sort of infection befalls Guo Yanwei in the novel *Feilong quanzhuan* 飛龍全傳 (The complete story of the flying dragon), when he is stricken by the evil *qi* of Gao Xingzhou’s decapitated head.⁹² Shen Fu 沈復 (1763–1810?), author of *Fusheng liuji* 浮生六記 (Six records of a floating life; comp. ca. 1808, pub. 1877) discusses his resolve to wait for his wife’s ghost to return (*guigui* 鬼歸, *sheng* 甦, *huisha* 回煞), while others fled the house to avoid it.⁹³ Ghosts returning was a sort of infection by place, but because proximity to the dead usually pointed to some kind of close relationship, those who were struck ill by a returning ghost or evil *qi* were not just in the wrong place at the wrong time, they were somehow culpable, worthy of infection. In this way, demonological illnesses depicted in all strata of literature helped to define human relationships.⁹⁴

5 Conclusion

Most pre-modern editions of the novels discussed in this chapter were printed with commentary. These novel commentaries emphasized many ways of reading each novel, and they are a little explored trove of information that helps us to understand not just how novels were understood, or what the primary criteria for aesthetic appreciation were, but what kinds of common knowledge were shared by literate people, and what kinds of experiences they may have had in their daily lives (comments like “I have seen such a thing” or “I remember it well ...”). Many commentators focused on medical and cosmological interpretations – noting *yin/yang* correspondences in the novel – action and stillness, elegance and baseness, union and separation from one passage to the

91 Yan Zhitui criticized this practice in his *Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓 (Admonitions for the Yan Clan). To “escape from the killing” (*bisha* 避煞), was a practice still prevalent and strongly criticized by Christian missionaries (See, for example, Li, *Pochu mixin quanshu*).

92 Wu Xuan, *Feilong quanzhuan*.

93 Shen, *Six Records*, *juan* 3, 73–75.

94 Judith Zeitlin’s *The Phantom Heroine: Ghosts and Gender in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature*, goes into wonderful detail about these thoughts.

next, or a patterning of novel elements that coincided with the five phases of all matter, and the structures of the cosmos.

Apologies for fiction in late imperial China, whether commentary or prefatory or within the novel text itself tended to focus on the act of reading as a particular kind of seeing. Reading about debauched characters with a detached air of sympathy could lead to enlightenment, some claimed, while others warned that the allure of fictional representation would only drag naive readers to imitate what they encountered there. Both apologies and accusations reinforced the notion that fiction was for sophisticated readers only, those who could look below the surface meaning – to read between the lines, to appreciate the finely wrought structure of the novel, its devices and methods. Reading fortunes included similar talent and implied dangers – whether it was reading facial features, images that corresponded to them, dates and times of birth, or interpreting obscure verses produced by an oracle, there were dire consequences for those who kept only to the surface meaning.

We can learn a lot about divination from fiction, and a lot about readers, authors and editors of fiction by looking at divination. Some of these issues are small, like authorship, hermeneutics, literary history or esoteric divinatory practices recorded in fictional texts, but others are large. To my way of thinking, the most important aspect of mantic practices in fiction, and divination in particular, is the implications for the concept of fate. Fictional texts foreshadow fates of characters with prognosticatory methods, but consistently question the veracity or accuracy of those results, likely in order to retain some element of suspense. Narratives do not want to sound fatalistic to readers – they are motivated to both propagate divinatory practice through representation of practices of daily life, and to call them into question. Fictional narratives routinely describe various mantic practices in loving detail. While the representation of that practice may be inaccurate, the text it creates is always true. This mantic text produced by divination puts characters in the position of readers. They have to interpret the text to get at their fates. The reader of the novel thus relates to the character, struggling to understand the mantic and the narrative text, lest misreading lead to some harm.

Mythologized tales of seers convinced consumers of those tales of their veracity – that is, mistaking fiction for truth led (perhaps only in the story) to the creation of door gods, and to the belief that Zhuge Liang was an avid practitioner and even progenitor of certain mantic arts.

The other major takeaway from this discussion of divination and literature is that fate makes room for human action. Realistic stories had to represent mantic and apotropaic practice, and the demands of fiction required prognostication to be tantamount to foreshadowing. But characters needed to not only

misread or disbelieve their fates in order to make for an interesting tale, they had to have the possibility to change their fates. The story knows that its readers, if not its characters, can discern the hidden meanings of oracular texts, be they verse or image, and had to provide those readers with the possibility of change. Hence we have in *Plum* the repeated statement that “you can know a man’s fate, but not his actions,” and in *Stone*, “you can know a man’s face, but never his heart” (*zhi ren zhi mian bu zhi xin* 知人知面不知心).⁹⁵ There are some stories that undermine fatalism through changing physiognomic features, or the dates and times of birth. The latter is reflected in Li Yu’s story “After modifying the eight characters, suffering ends and happiness comes” (*gai bazi kujin-ganlai* 改八字苦盡甘來), in which young Yamen runner Jiang Cheng 蔣成 sees his bad luck unexpectedly turn into good luck after a hermit fortune teller jokingly modifies the eight characters related with his date of birth. But more often, and more poignantly, fiction reminds readers of the limits of reading. That is, even if we divine correctly, and interpret the signs or images or texts that are produced during divination, there is still the matter of whimsy and the inscrutability of human behavior.

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The Living Traditions of Divination

Stéphanie Homola

1 Introduction

Divination is a living tradition in the Chinese world that includes mainland China, Taiwan, Singapore, and Chinese populations in Southeast Asian countries. The exceptional diversity of this tradition constitutes a gold mine for ethnography – although still largely un-exploited – as well as a challenge if one wishes to present a general overview, as is the purpose of this chapter.

A characteristic which has been noticed by historians of Chinese divination¹ gives some consistency to this task: divination is a factor of cultural unity. Similar mainstream mantic techniques can be found in today's Northern China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan. They convey a shared language and cosmology and reveal a widespread belief that cosmological factors influence human destiny, although conceptions on the scope and precise workings of such an influence may vary greatly among individuals and contexts. Sociologist C.K. Yang described the "belief in fate" as a major component of "diffused religion" in China.² According to this belief, one's fate is determined by Heaven and depends on one's birth date. One historical reason for such cultural unity is that mainstream mantic techniques were well-known among the literati in Imperial China and widely circulated, as civil servants were dispatched around the Empire. Today, such a phenomenon is accentuated by the circulation of people and the diffusion of knowledge via the Internet: the larger Chinese cities attract professional diviners from all over the country; curious clients and amateurs can find any information they desire on specialized websites; and diviners from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan can communicate through the Internet and visit each other to discuss their recent research results.

While divination is a factor of cultural unity, it also reflects the social diversity of Chinese society. All kinds of people (amateurs, professionals, religious

¹ Smith, *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers*, 9–10.

² Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*. Yang distinguishes Chinese "diffused religion," whose rituals such as ancestral and local deities cults are performed by families and members of local communities, from "institutionalized religions," such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, whose clergy is separate from believers.

specialists) from all kinds of social backgrounds (elite, commoners) perform all kinds of techniques (from the simplest to the most complex), in all kinds of contexts (religious, secular, para-academic, entertainment, family ...).

To describe such diversity, this chapter is organized into four main sections. First, it examines the terminology and classification of present-day techniques and practices. Second, it analyzes the living traditions of prognostication from the perspective of people who consult diviners and also reviews various questions raised by divination as a social phenomenon. The third section identifies several milestones within the recent historical development of mantic arts in China and Taiwan in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The last section is dedicated to practitioners and to what is often referred to as the “world of horoscopy” (*mingli jie* 命理界). While exploring these four main themes, this chapter also reviews existing literature and highlights topics requiring further research.

2 Terminology and Classification of Mantic Arts in Today's China

Understanding the diversity of today's mantic practices requires some definitions and classifications as well as a nuanced account of the vocabulary used by the clients and practitioners themselves. As Emily Ahern has noted, there is no Chinese word that designates divination as a whole.³ Nowadays, divination can be defined as a widespread private practice which aims to resolve problems and, broadly speaking, achieve harmony (*quji bixiong* 趨吉避凶: “continuously seeking for good fortune and rejecting misfortune”). Divination methods provide information on the past, present, and future about oneself or others, by resorting to experts who possess a specialized, superior knowledge, or to books and handbooks containing this knowledge.

Anthropologists, such as Emily Ahern, usually adopt a classical distinction between two kinds of divinatory practices, “inspired,” “intuitive,” “natural,” or “interpersonal” on one hand, “inductive,” “mechanical,” “technical,” or “artificial” on another hand:⁴ “One set of divinatory methods should be described as interpersonal in the sense that they are explicitly understood as efforts to communicate with the gods. Another set of methods do not involve forms of communication with sentient beings as a central feature; instead they are

3 Ahern, *Chinese Ritual and Politics*, 45. See also Marc Kalinowski's contribution in this volume.

4 See also Caquot and Leibovici, *La divination*, vi–ix.

concerned with understanding forces and processes that operate in the world.”⁵ However, in the Chinese context, the kind of method involved in the communication with gods entails further distinctions. “Inspired” divination implies communicating with divinities or ancestors through altered mental states such as visions or possession experienced by mediums in Chinese societies (whose abilities and names vary greatly, *jitong* 乩童, *tongling* 通靈, *lingmei* 靈媒, *you tianyan de* 有天眼的...). In temple divination (or temple oracles), petitioners seek knowledge from divinities not through specific mental states but through the mechanical manipulation of divinatory blocks (*jiao* 筊 or 筊) and sticks (*qian* 籤). Both mediumistic practices and temple divination can be performed as part of public or private rituals in temples or before ancestors’ altars.

Inductive methods in China are called “fate-calculation techniques” (*suanming shu* 算命術) or “numbers and techniques” (*shushu* 數術),⁶ and are generally referred to in English as “divinatory” or “mantic arts”, or simply “fortune-telling” in colloquial language. Divinatory arts are based on a methodical, codified examination of the natural order and its laws which, by virtue of a close correspondence between the microcosm and the macrocosm, gives access to knowledge about human affairs, as they have been settled by divine will (Heaven). Divinatory arts include a great variety of techniques. Whereas there are sometimes no clear-cut dividing lines between the methods, especially in the minds of the clients and non-specialists, most people understand at least the purpose of each technique as well as the implicit hierarchy between them.

Calendar horoscopy (*mingli* 命理) is one of the most widespread and mainstream techniques in the Chinese world. It is based on the construction and interpretation of a birth chart using the calendar components of a person’s birth date. Calendar horoscopy includes the “eight signs” (*bazi* 八字) method (also called the “four pillars,” *sizhu* 四柱) and, mainly in Taiwan, the *Ziwei doushu* 紫微斗數 method (numbers according to the Ziwei [star] and Plough), also known in English as “purple star astrology.”

Cleromancy (*zhanbu* 占卜) can be used as a general term for divination but also refers more precisely to casting and interpreting hexagrams from the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經 or *Zhouyi* 周易). This mainstream/elitist practice, which is valued at all social levels, also developed into a range of popular methods, such as “plum blossom divination” (*meihua yishu* 梅花易數), “the trigrams

5 Ahern, *Chinese Ritual and Politics*, 45.

6 “Numbers and techniques” (*shushu* 數術) generally refers to a bibliographical category in Imperial catalogues. Nowadays, “techniques and numbers” (*shushu* 術數) is widely used in publications on divinatory arts.

of King Wen" (*Wen wang gua* 文王卦), and *liuyao* 六爻 (the six lines [of the hexagram]). Whereas the *bazi* and *Ziwei doushu* methods can offer a general analysis of the petitioner's whole life, *zhanbu* is intended to answer specific queries at specific times. The more elitist *sanshi* 三式 (three divinations or cosmic boards), also called calendar astrology in English, tend to be performed by scholars and learned, professional diviners, and also aim at answering specific queries: *liuren* 六壬 (six *ren* [heavenly stems]), *qimen dunjia* 奇門遁甲 (hidden cycle), and *taiyi* 太乙 (great one). Another important branch within mantic arts gathers various techniques based on the analysis of external signs or forms (*xiang* 相). This includes the mainstream technique of site-selection for the living and the dead (*fengshui* 風水), physiognomy (*mianxiang* 面相) and palmistry (*shouxian* 手相) (which are sometimes depreciated due to the fact that they are often performed by street fortune-tellers), and divination through the examination of bones (*moqu* 摸骨). Also very common among the services offered by professional fortune-tellers are the mainstream techniques of name analysis (*xingming xue* 姓名學, *qiming* 起名), the day-selection (*zeri* 擇日) of auspicious dates for various activities, as well as the more elitist analysis of Chinese characters (*cezi* 測字 / *chaizi* 拆字, glyphomancy).

Clients are also fond of foreign techniques which coexist with traditional Chinese techniques. Thus, tarot (*taluopai* 塔羅牌) is particularly widespread in Taiwan and the island even experienced a "Western astrology fever" (*xing-zuo rechao* 星座熱潮) in the early 1990s after this method was popularized by Xingxue Wangzi 星星王子, the "prince of astrology."⁷

Mantic arts include many more techniques which cannot be listed exhaustively here. However, two points should be stressed regarding the classification and vocabulary of divinatory methods. First, if the broad classical distinction between inspired and inductive divination is operative in the Chinese context, it is mainly in the discourses of divination specialists. Masters of "numbers and techniques" (*shushu*) denigrate mediums as irrational and are eager to draw a clear dividing line between them. Mediums, on the other hand, denigrate mantic arts specialists, whose knowledge can be learned from books by anyone, whereas they themselves rely on unique spiritual gifts, granted to them by divinities. However, mediums commonly use mantic arts in combination with inspired divination, although this topic has been little studied. Second, rather than the term *shushu*, which is often associated with the mysterious and the occult, mantic arts practitioners refer to themselves according to the method they use: for instance, *mingli jia* 命理家 for a "specialist of horoscopy". The

7 See, for instance, *Ziyou shibao* 自由時報 (Liberty Times), August 6, 2005, January 2, 2007, and January 9, 2008.

general public uses the term “fate-calculation” (*suanming* 算命) to refer to all mantic arts (except for the methods based on the *Book of Changes*, which are usually referred to as *suangua* 算卦). However, just like *suanming xiansheng* 算命先生 (fortune-teller), *suanming* can be derogatory and should be used with caution when addressing practitioners.

Temple divination is certainly the field which has been the most thoroughly explored by anthropologists, mainly outside China, in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Practices involving divinatory blocks (*jiao* 筊, pronounced *poe* in Hokkien), sticks, and oracles (*qian* 籤) are described in numerous studies, particularly by David K. Jordan,⁸ Julian Pas,⁹ and Donald Hatfield.¹⁰ The main corpus of temple oracles in Taiwan was collected and analyzed by Werner Banck in *Das chinesische Tempelorakel*.¹¹ Carole Morgan studied temple oracles associated with the cult of Huang Daxian 黃大仙 (Wong Tai Sin in Cantonese) in Hong Kong¹² as well as other oracular sets in “An Introduction to the *Lingqi jing*”¹³ and “Old Wine in a New Bottle: A New Set of Oracle Slips from China.”¹⁴ Michel Strickmann presents a comparative perspective in *Chinese Poetry and Prophecy: The Written Oracle in East Asia*.¹⁵

Divinatory rituals associated with mediumistic practices represent one of the most striking aspects of Chinese religious life. Spirit-writing (*fujī* 扶乩), which is performed by “phoenix hall” (*luantang* 鸞堂) sects in Taiwan, is analyzed in David K. Jordan and Daniel Overmyer’s classical work, *The Flying Phoenix: Aspects of Chinese Sectarianism in Taiwan*,¹⁶ as well as Philip Clart’s article, “Moral Mediums: Spirit-Writing and the Cultural Construction of Chinese Spirit-Mediumship”¹⁷ (see also Clart and Goossaert’s contribution in the second volume of this book).

In “Enfant de divination, voyageur du destin,” Brigitte Berthier studied the exorcist ritual “correcting fate” (*gaiyun* 改運) which is practiced by mediums (*jitong* 乩童) in Taiwan.¹⁸ Her work reveals a close imbrication between

8 Jordan, “Taiwanese *poe* Divination,” 114–18.

9 Pas, “Temple Oracles in a Chinese City,” 1–45.

10 Hatfield, “Fate in the Narrativity and Experience of Selfhood,” 857–77.

11 Banck, *Das chinesische Tempelorakel: Teil I; Teil II, Übersetzung und Analysen*.

12 Morgan, “A propos des fiches oraculaires de Huang Daxian,” 163–91. On the cult of Huang Daxian, see also Lang and Ragvald, *The Rise of a Refugee God*.

13 Morgan, “An Introduction to the *Lingqi jing*,” 97–120.

14 Morgan, “Old Wine in a New Bottle,” 1–19.

15 Strickmann, *Chinese Poetry and Prophecy*.

16 Jordan and Overmyer, *The Flying Phoenix*.

17 Clart, “Moral Mediums.”

18 Berthier, “Enfant de divination,” 86–100.

inspired divination and divinatory arts, notably through the notion of fate, as it is expressed in a person's horoscope (or eight signs). Such is also the case in the ritual "restoring fate" (*buyun* 補運) studied by Hou Ching-lang, which is performed at New Year either in a temple by a Daoist priest or at home by the head of the family.¹⁹ In "The Chinese Belief in Baleful Stars," Hou Ching-lang examines the belief in stellar divinities in Taiwan and the rituals entitled "sending off baleful stars" (*song xiongxing* 送凶星) and "appeasing the Taisui [star]" (*an Taisui* 安太歲) which involve, in various stages, the participation of diviners, mediums, and Daoist priests.²⁰

Almanacs and their multiple uses – day-selection, divinatory formulae, worship of stellar and calendar deities, talismans – are studied in detail in *Le tableau du boeuf du printemps: Étude d'une page de l'almanach chinois* by Carole Morgan²¹ and in *Chinese Almanacs* by Richard Smith.²²

In comparison, inductive divinatory techniques have been surprisingly little studied. Geomancy (*fengshui* 風水) is undoubtedly the practice that has attracted the most attention from Western²³ and Japanese²⁴ anthropologists. Stephan Feuchtwang offers a synthesis in his book, *An Anthropological Analysis of Chinese Geomancy*,²⁵ while Ole Bruun analyzes the *fengshui* fever in China during the 1990s in terms of the relationship between political power and religion.²⁶

The few studies available on Chinese horoscopy and astrology focus almost exclusively on the method of the eight signs (*bazi*). This method and the history of its development are described in Chao Wei-pang's pioneering article, "The Chinese Science of Fate-Calculation."²⁷ Ho Peng Yoke also describes, albeit succinctly, the so-called *ziping bazi* 子平八字 technique in "The *Ziping* Method of

19 Hou, "Les Monnaies de la Trésorerie et la notion de Destin fondamental," 81–93.

20 Hou, "The Chinese Belief in Baleful Stars," 193–228.

21 Morgan, *Le tableau du boeuf du printemps*.

22 Smith, *Chinese Almanacs*.

23 Freedman, "Geomancy," 5–15; Freedman, "Chinese Geomancy," 189–221; March, "An Appreciation of Chinese Geomancy," 253–67; Lip, *Feng shui*; Obringer, *Fengshui*.

24 Watanabe Yoshio is the main Japanese anthropologist who worked on *fengshui* in Taiwan, Japan (particularly in Okinawa), and Mainland China. Watanabe, *Fūsui shisō to Higashi Ajia*, translated into Chinese as *Dongfang shehui zhi fengshui sixiang*; Watanabe, *Fūsui no shakai-jinruigaku*. See also Oguma, "The Village of 'Two Dragons,'" 116–31.

25 Feuchtwang, *An Anthropological Analysis of Chinese Geomancy*.

26 Bruun, "The *fengshui* Resurgence in China," 47–65; Bruun, *Fengshui in China*. Historical sources and concepts of *fengshui* are also examined in Morgan, "Tang Geomancy"; Field, "The Numerology of Nine Star *Fengshui*," 3–33; Bruun, "On the 'Origin' of *Fengshui*," 263–83.

27 Chao, "The Chinese Science of Fate-Calculation."

Fate-Calculation.”²⁸ The *ziping* method and examples of consultations are analyzed in an unpublished paper by Véronique Berthelet, “L’horoscopie calendaire exercée par Monsieur Yin, praticien taiwanais sans enseigne,”²⁹ as well as in Lo Chen-Hsin’s dissertation.³⁰ Manfred Kubny, a scholar and practitioner who was trained by a master in Taiwan, has published a comprehensive study, detailing the history, concepts, methods as well as many practical cases of the *bazi* method.³¹ Notable among the non-academic scholars working on Chinese horoscopy in the Western world is Jean-Michel de Kermadec, a French practitioner who trained in China and published a book which popularizes the *bazi* method: *Les piliers du destin: la chronomancie, expression de la vision chinoise du monde*.³²

William Matthews analyzes Chinese cosmology through the lens of six lines prediction (*liuyao yuce* 六爻預測), a widespread *Yijing*-based divinatory technique.³³

The analysis of written characters (glyphomancy) is examined in Wolfgang Bauer’s “Chinese Glyphomancy (*ch’ai tzu*) and its Uses in Present Day Taiwan,”³⁴ and, recently, in Brigitte Baptandier’s “Writing as a Threshold between the Worlds: Glyphomancy in China.”³⁵

Laurence Thompson studied dream divination in Taiwanese temples.³⁶ In Mainland China, Brigitte Baptandier described the pilgrimage to the Mount of Stones and Bamboo (Shizhu shan 石竹山) in Fujian, which develops around dream divination practices that combine a set of mantic techniques, such as physiognomy, horoscopy, glyphomancy, and divinatory blocks and slips.³⁷ In “Chinese Divination: An Ethnographic Case Study,” Choong Ket Che provides an excellent ethnographic description of the training, techniques, and work of a Hong Kong-born diviner in Singapore.³⁸

28 Ho, “The *Ziping* Method of Fate-Calculation,” in *Chinese Mathematical Astrology*, 153–64.

29 Berthelet, “L’horoscopie calendaire exercée par Monsieur Yin.”

30 Lo, “Fortune-Telling in Contemporary Taiwan.”

31 Kubny, *Traditionelle chinesische Astrologie*.

32 de Kermadec, *Les piliers du destin*.

33 Matthews, “Ontology with Chinese characteristics,” and “Encompassing the Horse.”

34 Bauer, “Chinese Glyphomancy.” See also Mark, “Orthography Riddles.”

35 Baptandier, “Writing as a Threshold.”

36 Thompson, “Dream Divination and Popular Religion,” 73–82.

37 Baptandier, “Entrer en montagne pour y rêver,” 83–98.

38 Choong, “Chinese Divination.”

3 Divination as a Social Phenomenon

3.1 *Tentative Quantifications of Practicing People*

How many people in China believe in fortune-telling? The question has been bothering the media, scholars, and governmental agencies for a while. Divinatory practices and beliefs are a widespread social phenomenon which is nevertheless hard to assess precisely. According to a common saying, one person out of three “believes” in fortune-telling. However, few large-scale surveys have been conducted in Mainland China.

The Chinese Association for Science and Technology (CAST), dedicated to the popularization of science, conducted three nationwide surveys in 1996, 1998, and 2002, to determine public opinion on fortune-telling, *fengshui*, and other “superstitions.”³⁹ It showed that 26.5% of Chinese people believed in fate-calculation (*suanming*) in 2002, compared with 35.5% in 1998 and 28.7% in 1996. Meanwhile, 38.6% thought that “*Fengshui* makes sense” (*Fengshui you daoli* 風水有道理) in 2002, compared to 51.2% in 1998. Scholar of Chinese religions Yang Fenggang also quotes a survey led by the Shanghai Chinese Communist Youth League in 1995 among young people who were supposedly close to the Communist Party ideology: 18% rejected superstitious beliefs (*mixin*): *Yijing*-based divination (*suangua*), glyphomancy (*cezi*), physiognomy (*xiangmian* 相面); 42% said that they “do not completely believe but cannot disbelieve”; 31% were “curious about it but do not believe”; and 8% chose “it is hard to say.”⁴⁰ A report published in the journal of the State Religious Affairs Bureau assessed that five million individuals made a living by fortune-telling in the mid-1990s.⁴¹ For the past ten years, Communist Party members and government officials have been reportedly engaged in fortune-telling,⁴² which led Xi Jinping to reassert the ban on “superstitious activities” among Party members and officials in 2016.⁴³ However, a potential bias of such surveys is

39 “Zhongguo gongzhong dui weizhi xianxiang deng youguan wenti de kanfa chouyang diaocha 中國公眾對未知現象等有關問題的看法抽樣調查” [A Chinese public sample survey on opinions about unknown phenomena and related matters]. See Jin, “Zhongguo kexie daxing diaocha biao ming woguo kepu xingshi yanjun”; “Woguo 4 ren zhong jiu you 1 ren xiangxin suanming.”

40 Yang, *Religion in China*, 119. Yang also notes that the proportion of clear rejection is similar to that in the US population, when asked questions about astrology.

41 Zheng, “Dui kanxiang, suanming deng huodong buke dengxian shizhi.”

42 According to a study by the State Administration College in 2007, more than half of Public Service officials believe in some form of superstition: Yang, “Yiban yishang xian-chuji gongwuyuan nan ju ‘mixin’.”

43 Blanchard and Lim, “Uncertain Times Fuel Occult Beliefs in China’s Party Hierarchy.”

that most of them use derogatory terms (*mixin*, *suanming*) when asking the questions, while questions referring to *Yijing* rather than *suanming* (fortune-telling) may elicit more positive answers. Moreover, these surveys mainly give information about people's discourses: what people say they believe may not reflect what they do and the results do not reflect whether or not they actually consult fortune-tellers.

Results of the latter kind were produced in Taiwan through the most comprehensive survey which has been conducted so far. It was part of the large-scale Taiwan Social Change Survey conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the Academia Sinica from 1985 onward, which includes sections dedicated to divination. Figure 12.1 shows an increase in practices during the 1990s, which has been called locally "fortune-telling fever" (*suanming re* 算命熱). In 1994, a peak of 38.5% of the population consulted a fortune-teller at least once in their life.

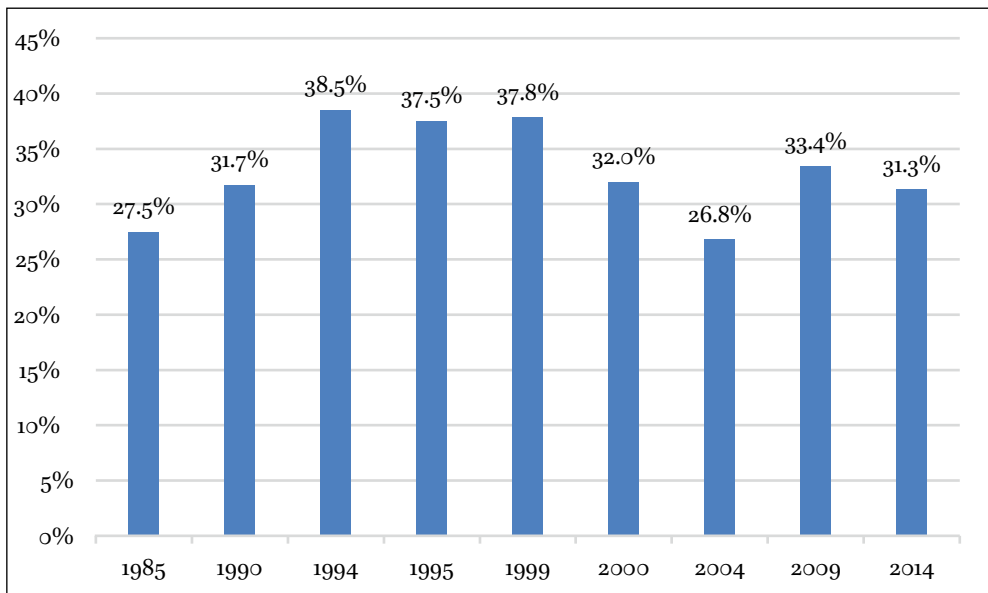


FIGURE 12.1 Percentage of people who went for *suanming* at least once in their life

Note: This figure is a compilation of the results of different reports by the Taiwan Social Change Survey, available in Chinese at <http://www.ios.sinica.edu.tw/sc/cht/scDownload2.php#first> (accessed February 12, 2018). The question asked was "Have you ever in the past taken the initiative to have your fate calculated?" (請問您過去有沒有主動找人算過命?)

TABLE 12.1 "Do you think that fate can be known through these methods?" (1995)^a

Method	Yes	No	I don't know
<i>Bazi</i> 八字	59 %	28 %	13 %
<i>Ziwei doushu</i> 紫微斗數	41 %	30 %	30 %
Face/palm-reading 面/手相	52 %	31 %	17 %
Examination of bones 摸骨	30 %	38 %	32 %
Western astrology 星座	26 %	38 %	34 %

a The original Chinese question is: 您相信命運可以從下列算命方法中看出來嗎? See Qu, "Shushu liuxing yu shehui bianqian," 276.

TABLE 12.2 "Is it necessary to choose an auspicious date for these events?" (1995)^a

Situation	Yes	I don't care	No
Wedding	84 %	8 %	6 %
Moving home	79 %	11 %	8 %
Starting a business	81 %	7 %	6 %
Travel	15 %	30 %	52 %
Funeral	88 %	4 %	5 %

a The original Chinese question is: 您個人認為做下列事情要選日子嗎? See *ibid.*, 276.

Comparing the orders of magnitude of these figures reveals an interesting gradation: in 1995, 37.5% of people went for *suanming*, or fortune-telling, at least once in their life; 59% thought that the method of the eight signs makes it possible to calculate the future; and 84.5% considered that it is important to choose a fortunate date for a wedding. There is thus a discrepancy between the people who actually practice (37.5%) and the people who do not practice but agree with the principles of divination. In other words, a significant percentage of people think that mantic arts can reveal the future but never consulted a diviner. Consequently, surveys which ask people if they "believe" in fortune-telling underestimate the number of people who say that they do not really believe but still consult fortune-tellers, while surveys which ask if people "consult fortune-tellers" underestimate the number of people who say that they believe but do not consult them.

Indeed, mantic practices are difficult to grasp through quantitative surveys. As scholars have shown more generally about Chinese religion,⁴⁴ they resist statistics because, as part of a cosmological worldview – as non-uniform as it may be and despite the two Chinese revolutions which have failed to eradicate it –, they concern virtually everyone who was born Chinese. This is one reason why ethnographic studies have been, by far, scholars' favored approach to divinatory practices in the Chinese world.

3.2 *Ethnographic Approaches*

Although many topics still need to be explored, ethnographic and qualitative-driven research examines various aspects of mantic practices as a social phenomenon, particularly in relation to the Chinese conception of fate.⁴⁵

In *Religion in Chinese Society*, C.K. Yang provides a functionalist analysis of divinatory institutions.⁴⁶ According to him, the primary function of a belief in fate is psychological: to attenuate the shock of a child's premature death, for example. The concept of supernatural determinism also helps to moderate the frustrations arising from social life and account for successes and failures: fate can explain why strict compliance with traditional moral rules does not necessarily lead to success, thus preserving confidence in social institutions. Dissatisfaction is directed against fate rather than the family model and its traditional value system.

In his article, "The Concept of Fate in Chinese Folk Ideology,"⁴⁷ Stevan Harrell analyzes how the conception of an all-powerful destiny leads to a fatalistic attitude and can thus become an ideological instrument of power in the hands of the ruling class. According to him, the ambivalent nature of what he calls "popular ideology" can account for the apparent contradiction within the Chinese notion of fate. On the one hand, fate can be a tool used to justify the domination of the ruling class. Such a conception of fate leads to passivity and resignation toward determinism: the ultimate cause of misfortunes is fate rather than the social order. But, on the other hand, such fatalism, which forms part of the Confucian tradition, is also a source of personal strength and endurance which helps one to accept and overcome failure. Stevan Harrell notes that such a fatalistic ideology, which may lead to satisfaction regarding oppression, laziness, and a lack of planning for the future, is exactly the opposite of what

44 Thoraval, "Pourquoi les 'religions chinoises,'" 37–44.

45 Eberhard, "Fatalism in the Life of the Common Man," 148–60. For a state-of-the-art insight on this issue, see Sangren, "Fate and Agency," 117–35.

46 Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, 261–65.

47 Harrell, "The Concept of Fate," 90–109.

he calls the “Chinese entrepreneurial ethic,” a culture which values industrious work, frugality, and preparation for the future.

Indeed, one line of research⁴⁸ studies the relationship between the conception of fate and a Chinese “entrepreneurial ethic,” particularly in reference and opposition to the work of Max Weber and his vast project of analyzing how religious ethics shape lifestyles and the economic mentality. In the chapter “Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy” of his work on China, *Confucianism and Taoism*,⁴⁹ Max Weber studies the relationship between Confucianism and Daoism as well as the role of magic in Chinese popular religion, and highlights the different factors which have, according to him, prevented the emergence of a rational way of life in China. In “Fate and Fortune: Popular Religion and Moral Capital in Shenzhen” by Fan Lizhu, James Withehead, and Evelyn Withehead,⁵⁰ the conception of fate appears as a spiritual resource that migrant workers in Shenzhen mobilize to cope with the rapid economic and social changes that occurred during the 1980s and 1990s.

Divinatory practices in relation to family and gender issues have also attracted the attention of scholars.⁵¹ Wolfram Eberhard studied the customs related to analyzing the compatibility of the bride and groom’s birth dates to initiate a marriage.⁵² He demonstrated that so-called “auspicious” marriages are no more common than so-called “non-auspicious” marriages. Thus, according to him, such a custom does not reflect a belief in fate but can, like any other tradition, be used to justify cancelling a marriage arrangement that the families wish to end for other reasons.

In her article, “The Woman with Broken Palm Lines: Subject, Agency, Fortune-Telling, and Women in Taiwanese Television Drama,”⁵³ Lin Szu-Ping condemns divinatory practices as a discourse that serves male domination. Her work is based on an analysis of a television series which was broadcast from 1996, beating all audience figures and becoming a social phenomenon. This series tells of the struggle of a woman, whose hand lines represent one of the four bad configurations of female fates (*nüming* 女命),⁵⁴ to break the

48 Harrell, “Why Do the Chinese Work So Hard?” 203–26; Oxfeld Basu, “Profit, Loss, and Fate.”

49 Weber, *The Religion of China*.

50 Fan, Withehead, and Withehead, “Fate and Fortune,” 83–100.

51 See for instance, Topley, “Cosmic Antagonisms,” 233–49.

52 Eberhard, “Auspicious Marriages,” 49–55.

53 Lin, “The Woman with Broken Palm Lines,” 222–37.

54 Divinatory techniques define eight main configurations of female fates, four of which are auspicious and four inauspicious. In palmistry, when, among the three main lines on the hand representing life, reason, and emotions, the lines of reason and emotion conjoin, they form a configuration called *duanzhang* 斷掌 which is said to be hereditary and

chains whereby the belief in fate imprisons her. The story of this woman, determined to face all obstacles to maintain her family over time, provoked spontaneous testimonies from women who had experienced a comparable fate. The company which produced the soap organized a series of promotional activities to "break the superstition." Adopting a feminist perspective,⁵⁵ Lin Szu-Ping denounces the belief in divination as a discourse at the service of the traditional patriarchal system: "It is a discourse that has the ability to operate with the hegemony of knowledge and power in the arena of telling fortunes and fates. It prescribes what counts as truth and what does not, especially, for my purpose, regarding *nüming*, the fortune of a woman."⁵⁶ Paradoxically, the inferior position of women in Chinese society is often invoked to justify the fact that they consult fortune-tellers more frequently than men.

In opposition to such a critical position, Lo Chen-Hsin highlights the function of divination as "psychological support" (*xinli fudao* 心理輔導).⁵⁷ His analysis is based on a comparison between Taiwanese diviners and Western psychologists. Can the former provide psychological support in a way comparable to the latter? According to Lo, several factors in Taiwan create an environment which is more conducive to diviners than psychologists. First, the widespread confusion in Taiwan between "psychiatrists" and "psychologists" favors the impression that psychologists only treat abnormal people. Although some diviners see themselves as psychologists, most of them consider that they deal with normal people, as fate, future, luck and bad luck are everyone's concern. The "normality" of divination allows diviners to counsel clients who would never visit a psychologist.

Lo Chen-Hsin also argues that the organization of the transmission of divinatory knowledge provides a more favorable framework for psychological support than does Western psychology. The variety of fortune-tellers' personalities and skills gives clients greater freedom of choice. Fortune-tellers receive no formal training and follow highly varied life courses. With the exception of a few family transmissions, most practitioners have had another job before becoming a diviner. The variety of their social conditions and experiences

inauspicious for the family of the husband who marries a woman with such a mark. Such a wife is said to have a psychological tendency to kill her husband, whereas an identical configuration on a man's hand is a sign of especial good fortune.

55 See also Lin, *Nüren!*

56 Lin, "The Woman with Broken Palm Lines," 226.

57 Lo, "Suanming yu xinli fudao," 316–37. This article is based on participant observation of divinatory consultations as well as interviews with practitioners and clients in Taipei. On this concept of divination as psychotherapy, see also Smith, "The Psychology of Divination;" Tseng, "Folk Psychotherapy in Taiwan," 164–78.

corresponds to the diversity of their clientele. Lo Chen-Hsin gives the example of the “street of fortune-telling” near Xingtian Temple in Taipei, where customers walk among the stands in search of a suitable diviner. Such tacit agreement between a fortune-teller and the client who chooses him is called “having a predisposition” (*youyuan* 有緣). On the contrary, although they may have varied personal experiences, psychologists receive formal training and tend to follow standardized practices. In a given situation, they will provide relatively standardized answers. Their interpretations are flexible but do not rely on the variety of social experiences. Moreover, the high social status of the psychologist – as a specialist in the medical field – hinders communication with the client. Such a flaw is precisely the diviner’s advantage: since his social status is low, no one feels inferior to him.

Lastly, the course of the divinatory consultations themselves creates favorable conditions for the emergence of such a psychological support function. The birth chart used by the fortune-teller makes it possible to address the intimate problems of clients in a systematic way and to express them more easily. The practitioner does not give the impression that he is investigating (he simply “reads” the chart) and the client does not feel that any secrets are being snatched from him. Thus, the fortune-teller has direct, quick access to the heart of the client’s problems. Unlike the psychologist, the diviner acquires the confidence of the client immediately and efficiently by analyzing his past. During the consultation, the fortune-teller is the one who speaks most,⁵⁸ whereas the client merely asks a few questions: he does not have to express the intricacies of the problem. In the case of a psychologist, on the contrary, the client speaks most of the time and the psychologist only intervenes occasionally. In the eyes of the Taiwanese, this method seems unprofitable and ineffective, contrary to the fortune-teller’s chart, which allows them to avoid providing details. According to Lo, the Taiwanese’s preference for fortune-tellers is also a matter of dignity. Unveiling one’s life to a psychologist is difficult, while consulting a diviner is both faster and easier to bear psychologically, especially since it is always possible to criticize and discard what the fortune-tellers said.

Using a ritual-oriented approach, other studies focus on the moment of the consultation itself and analyze how the diviner and client process a result together and reach an agreement on what is “true” (*zhun* 准) or “not true” (*bu zhun* 不准).⁵⁹ Thus, the structure of different divinatory rituals can be considered as a model for decision-making in a situation of uncertainty. Divinatory rituals are effective not because they reveal the future but because they

58 About fortune-tellers’ speech skills, see Lo, “Suanming jiqiaoli de yuyan biaoyan,” 37–60.

59 Homola, “Judging Destiny,” 39–57.

function cognitively as a method for obtaining information about the social environment and how the individual can fit into it effectively.

Clients' motivations to consult fortune-tellers are also analyzed in relation to life cycle.⁶⁰ People usually start consulting when they are in college for career orientation, going abroad, and then marriage and important life events. Financial and economic investments, career, moving home, lawsuits, lost objects, and choosing a name for a new-born baby are also among the most common questions put to fortune-tellers. It has also been noted how the path that leads people to consult and continue consulting fortune-tellers is a learning process: during the consultations, the clients also learn about mantic arts, which can lead to self-practice. Some clients may develop a personal interest in divination and start learning the techniques on their own or with a teacher. After training on their own case and helping relatives and friends, these persons may, as an increasing number of people consult them, gradually become fortune-tellers themselves.⁶¹

While individual practices have received a good deal of attention from scholars, two fields of research need further examination. First, the diversity of mantic techniques and the cultural creativity of practitioners are largely under-appreciated. Thus, we lack case studies on many mantic techniques which may not be mainstream but are still practiced by many people in the Chinese world, as well as on many other techniques which have not yet been identified by scholars. Such studies may reveal regional aspects which are usually underestimated in the field, as well as processes of knowledge circulation and adaptation to contemporary issues.

Second, many social aspects of mantic practices, which often make the headlines, still need scholarly examination. There is a lack of systematic inquiries, specific case studies, and large-scale studies which go beyond journalistic inquiries on a series of social issues:

- Divination & politics: it is well known how the alleged influence of fortune-tellers and *fengshui* masters over certain Communist Party officials has led the Party to reinforce the bans on superstition⁶² and conduct regular crackdowns on practitioners.⁶³ However, the Party does promote a “culture

60 Homola, “Pursue Good Fortune,” 124–47.

61 *Idid.*, 132.

62 Lau, “Superstitious World of Corrupt Politicians;” “Superstition Ain't the Way.”

63 See, for instance, “China Cracks Down on Fortune-Tellers;” and “Yonghe gong ‘suanming yitiao jie’ bei cha.” For a brief overview of the Chinese Communist Party's policies and regulations regarding fortune-tellers, see Homola, “From *jianghu* to *liumang*,” 366–91.

of luck" (*jixiang wenhua* 吉祥文化) in state-controlled temples⁶⁴ and did seek a form of cosmological legitimacy when choosing an auspicious date to launch the Beijing Olympics.

- Divination & earthquake prediction:⁶⁵ earthquake prediction is one of the research fields developed by practitioners who seek to contribute to the country's well-being while enhancing the status of mantic arts and gaining social and political recognition.
- Divination & health: the influence of fortune-telling on the increasing, high levels of C-sections performed in the Chinese world is an important public health matter.⁶⁶ Sociologist and demographer Daniel Goodkind paved the way for this key research field in his work on how beliefs in the zodiacal signs influence the birth rate in the Chinese world.⁶⁷
- Divination & real estate: how does *fengshui* impact on real estate both in China and abroad?⁶⁸ Other public policy matters, such as traffic regulation, similarly require more scholarly attention.⁶⁹

4 Some Milestones in Recent History (20th–21st c.)

The recent historical developments of mantic arts shed light on their social importance in contemporary Chinese societies. The 1911 Chinese revolution aimed to create a New Man who would give up "backward" beliefs and practices such as bound feet and fortune-telling. The latter was, at that time, labelled "superstition," in opposition to the state-sanctioned beliefs, rituals, and cults which were integrated into the state-regulated official "religions." Rebecca Nedostup has shown how the bans on divinatory practices which were implemented by the Nationalist Government in the 1920s and 1930s never

64 This "culture of luck" can be defined as a set of beliefs in the hourly and stellar divinities of the sexagesimal cycle and in the zodiacal signs, as well as in the protective powers of objects and talismans. It develops into various practical devices, games, and rituals which aim to test or promote luck. It is conspicuous, for example, in the Yonghe and Baiyun Temples in Beijing and even developed into a fair atmosphere in Badachu 八大處 Temples Complex, West of Beijing.

65 Jacobs, "Superstitions about Quake Meet the Web."

66 Tsang, "C-section Baby Boom as Parents Rush."

67 Goodkind, "New Zodiacal Influences," 127–42; Goodkind, "Creating New Traditions," 663–86. See also Wong and Yung, "Do Dragons Have Better Fate?" 689–97; Nye and Johnson, "Does Fortune Favor Dragons?" 85–97.

68 Cheung, "Australian Developers Build Feng Shui Homes."

69 Jaffe, "How Chinese Superstition About the Number 4 Makes Beijing Traffic Worse."

truly succeeded.⁷⁰ One reason was that practitioners tried to resist the bans by adapting and affiliating their activity to the new intellectual, state-promoted category of “science”;⁷¹ the authorities also came to realize that fortune-telling provided a living for thousands of poor and handicapped people, whom they failed to integrate in their ambitious but inefficient economic development and health programs.

However, these bans had two major practical, long-term consequences on divination practices. First, practitioners lost any kind of institutional framework to perform their activities, be it in a scholarly context, as used to be the case for *Yijing*-related divination, or in a religious context for Buddhist and Daoist monks who were proficient in mantic arts. Monks and scholars continued to practice divination but were compelled to do so privately and sometimes in secrecy. Second, the richness of divinatory practices was subject to a kind of leveling down: in the view of the authorities but also the general public, very different knowledge and practices, including elitist ones practiced by scholars, were combined together on the same (low) level, a trend that practitioners also sought to resist in vain. Divinatory knowledge was excluded from the institutionalization process of academic disciplines which took place in China at that time and relegated to the domain of esotericism and popular culture.

Historical studies are lacking on the 1949–1980 period. Many documents were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and the number of witnesses of the period is diminishing over time. The few existing reports show that, after 1949, practitioners experienced ups and downs according to the changing policies of the Communist Party.⁷² However, the general impression is that mantic arts were still practiced privately and that the period of strict restriction (with no practice at all and the destruction of documents) was limited to the decade of the Cultural Revolution. Thus, further research could seek to answer the following questions: was it enough to break the transmission lines? Or can this relatively short period of strict restriction account for the revival of mantic arts in China after 1979?

Similarly, more studies are required on the two decades following China's reform and opening up, and the so-called “fever of *Book of Changes*’ studies” (*Yixue re* 易學熱) and “fortune-telling fever” (*suanming re* 算命熱)⁷³ in the

70 Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*. See also Poon, “Religion, Modernity, and Urban Space,” 247–75.

71 Li and Lackner, “Contradictory Forms of Knowledge?”

72 Homola, “The Fortunes of a Scholar,” 733–52.

73 See, for instance, the highly instructive “non-fiction novel” (*baogao wenxue* 報告文學) Yi, *Dangdai Zhongguo de suanming re*. This well-documented work of fiction outlines

1980s and 1990s. The growing interest in “numbers and techniques” (*shushu*) was also boosted by recent discoveries from excavated texts.⁷⁴ This raises the question of to which extent such revivals fall within the scope of the more general “cultural fever” (*wenhua re* 文化熱) of the time which was, at first, an anti-traditionalist movement. Further research could include portraits of famous diviners and their networks, such as the eight signs master Shao Weihua 邵偉華,⁷⁵ the *Yijing* masters Liu Dajun 劉大鈞 and Tang Mingbang 唐明邦, and the Buddhist master Nan Huaijin 南懷瑾.⁷⁶

The “fortune-telling fever” in Mainland China experienced a quantitative boom from 2010 onward, characterized by a spectacular rise in the number of diviners’ offices, conspicuous signs in the urban landscape of China’s cities,⁷⁷ development of merchandising (advertisements, by-products), use of modern technology (dedicated software and websites), and proliferation of manuals and book series on mantic arts, sold in both specialized and general bookstores.

Although divination practices are widely tolerated today, the legal status of practitioners in Mainland China⁷⁸ remains ambiguous and precarious, as their activity falls under the prohibited category of “superstitious activities,” targeted by the Criminal Law⁷⁹ and public security regulations. Most of the time, enforcement depends on the local governments, which adopt a more or less tolerant attitude. Significant differences between regions reflect the theoretical and ideological struggle of the leaders in charge of religious policy to distinguish acceptable religions from reprehensible superstitions. The relatively open climate of the late 1970s was followed by a general crackdown in the 1980s, during the campaign against “spiritual pollution.” The repression

the development of divination practices in the 1990s, especially the most modest ones performed by street fortune-tellers. Adopting the style of this literary genre, which denounces the wrongs of Chinese society under the guise of fiction, the author depicts street fortune-tellers in a human light, presenting them as the victims of poverty and of indiscriminate repression by the authorities.

74 See, for instance, the encyclopedia *Zhongguo fangshu gaiguan* 中國方術概觀 (A General Study of Chinese Occult Arts), which was published in 1993 by Li Ling 李零, a specialist on excavated texts.

75 Born in 1936, from a working-class background, Shao Weihua was a major figure in the revival of mantic practices in the early 1990s. He is the most famous diviner in China and his manuals on the eight signs method have become references for both professional and amateur practitioners.

76 Despeux, “The ‘New Clothes’ of Sainthood in China,” 349–393.

77 The *hutong* around Yonghe Temple in Beijing, where diviners’ signs have been thriving since 2010, are a striking example. This even led to a crack-down by the local authorities in 2013 (“Yonghe gong ‘suanming yitiao jie’ bei cha”).

78 For a more detailed review, see Homola, “From *jianghu* to *liumang*.”

79 Articles 99 and 165 of the 1979 Criminal Law and article 300 of the 1997 Criminal Law.

gradually slackened, especially in the 2000s. However, in the context of Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign, repressive measures aim to combat the influence of fortune-telling among officials and Party members.

However, to my knowledge, Criminal Law articles have never been used against fortune-tellers. Divination practices are considered neither a serious crime nor a threat to political power but rather require educational policies. Beyond Criminal Law, superstitious activities are also governed by provincial public security regulations, some of which specifically prohibit "witchcraft, *suanming*, divination by analyzing characters, divination by hexagram, physiognomy and other illegal superstitious activities."⁸⁰ Divination practices are also addressed within regulations relating to fraud, gambling, and pornography, with which they have been associated since the campaigns against superstitions in the 1920s and 1930s. Increasing references to fortune-telling in regulations related to public places in the 2000s suggest that its practice has become increasingly conspicuous in Chinese cities. Fortune-telling may, therefore, be banned in public parks and their surroundings, as well as around stations, large squares, markets, tourist sites, and religious sites.

Among the topics which still need to be investigated in the field of Chinese divination, the transmission and development process of mantic arts in Taiwan is of particular interest. A fair amount of legwork remains to be done to collect testimonies and information which are often dispersed across the technical manuals written by mantic arts specialists. In lack of more detailed studies, these developments can only be briefly sketched here. Although the Japanese colonial authorities condemned superstitions,⁸¹ there were probably practitioners of *fengshui*, face-reading and palm-reading, as well as temple divination when the Nationalists arrived in Taiwan in 1949.⁸² However, in contradiction to the modernizing and scientist ideology conveyed by the nationalist regime, it seems that sophisticated mantic arts, such as calendar horoscopy, developed little during the Japanese era and were introduced by *waishengren* 外省人 (Mainlanders) after the Second World War. Many renowned practitioners of the Republican era were close to the nationalist and liberal circles which constituted a large proportion of their clientele. These elite connoisseurs and collectors of the classics of the art, and also many semi-professional

80 "Guanyu chajin shenhan, wupo he suanming, cezi, bugua, xiangmian deng mixin weifa huodong de tonggao."

81 As the Japanese model strongly influenced China's reformist imperial policies at the end of the nineteenth century and Republican policies, as well as the reflection of Chinese intellectuals on the modernization of Chinese society and culture, it is unsurprising that both the Japanese colonial government and the Nationalist regime condemned superstitions.

82 Sō, *Taiwan shūkyō to meishin rōshū* (translated into Chinese: Sō, *Taiwan de mixin yu louxi*).

or amateur practitioners who filled the ranks of the nationalist army which fled to Taiwan, played an important role in the transmission of mantic arts on the island. Thus, the “three great Shanghainese masters of fate-computation” (*Shanghai mingxue san dajia* 上海命學三大家) of the Republican era, Yuan Shushan 袁樹珊 (1881–1968), Xu Lewu 徐樂吾 (1886–1949), and Wei Qianli 韋千里 (1911–1988), fled China to take refuge in Taiwan and Hong Kong, the latter being an important place for knowledge transmission in the decades following the Second World War. Interviews with present-day practitioners in Taiwan reveal that many of them were trained by Mainlander masters. It was not until the late 1970s, after a period of training, that practitioners born in Taiwan, either native Taiwanese or second generation Mainlanders, appropriated knowledge on calendar horoscopy.

Two generations of Taiwanese practitioners can be identified in the transmission process of mantic arts in Taiwan from the 1950s, corresponding to two waves of publications (fig. 12.2). As mentioned, a first generation of Taiwanese practitioners was trained by Mainlander practitioners in the 1960s and 1970s and started publishing books on mantic techniques from the mid-1980s. This first wave of publications was mainly intended for practitioners. The scale of the second wave of publications in the mid-1990s (with almost a hundred books being published in 1997) suggests a popularization of mantic arts which reached a wider audience, including not only professional practitioners but also amateurs and clients who could learn the techniques by themselves via didactic books and do-it-yourself manuals.

The media and commercial development of mantic arts in the mid-1990s, through publications, consultations, and courses, was labelled “fortune-telling fever.” Compared with Mainland China, characteristics of this fever in Taiwan included a penchant for non-Chinese methods such as Western astrology (*xingzuo*) and tarot (*talupai*), wide media coverage (fortune-telling columns in newspapers, dedicated radio and television programs), as well as publicized relationships between politicians and counseling diviners.

Another Taiwanese specificity is the popularity of the calendar astrology method called *Ziwei doushu* (numbers according to the Ziwei [star] and Plough) which is, conversely, very rare in Mainland China. This method was transmitted from China to Japan from the ninth century. Whereas a modern form of it remained widely popular in Japan, it somehow fell into oblivion in Mainland China and was introduced to Taiwan at the end of the 1960s, when a Taiwanese diviner translated books by several famous Japanese specialists.⁸³

83 The works of Abe Taizan 阿部泰山 and Satô Rikuryû 佐藤六龍 were introduced and translated by the veteran Zhang Yaowen 張耀文 from Fujian who, from the 1970s, was the first author in Taiwan to publish books on this method in Chinese.

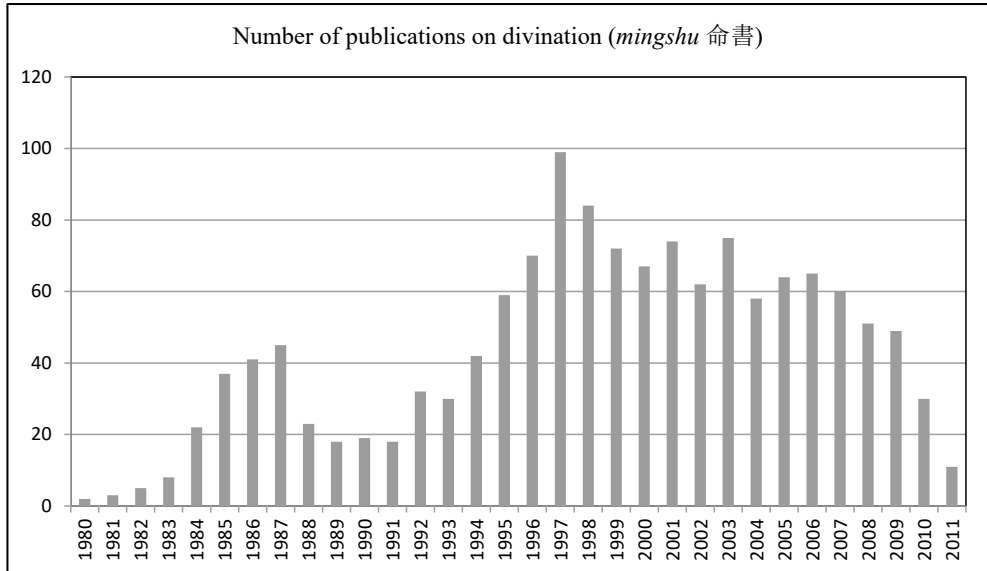


FIGURE 12.2 Number of books published on divination (*mingshu* 命書) in Taiwan from 1980 to 2011
 Note: Homola, “La relation de maître à disciple en question,” 19. This table is based on a systematic search of the category (*biaoti* 標題) *mingshu* 命書 (books on fate) in the catalogue of the National Library in Taiwan. The 1,395 publications counted here do not represent by far the total number of publications on mantic arts which are classified under many other categories in library catalogues.

The introduction of this method gave rise to a proliferation of schools of thought (*xuepai* 學派) among practitioners, a boom in publications, and a strong popular enthusiasm in the 1980s and 1990s.

The rapid development of mantic arts in Taiwan from the 1980s onward can also be explained by the favorable political and cultural context. The lifting of martial law in 1987 and looser State control over the media coincided with the development of a cultural industry, which became an additional means of measuring the economic success of the island. While divination practices had been excluded from the nationalist policies in favor of “traditional Chinese culture”⁸⁴ until the 1980s, they gradually became an original element of Taiwanese culture (*Taiwan de tese* 臺灣的特色). Thus, the Taipei city government invested in the development of “streets of fortune-telling” to attract tourists, especially from Japan, where Chinese mantic arts are highly prized. Tourism from Japan is presented as a quest for authentic traditions which have long been eradicated in Communist China and contributes to build an image of Taiwan as the last stronghold of Chinese ancestral traditions.

84 Chun, “From Nationalism to Nationalizing,” 126–47.

In the 1990s and 2000s, practices which had been denigrated as “popular,” like divination, became part of a wider academic debate with political and cultural implications, known as the “indigenization movement” (*bentuhua* 本土化). In reaction to the hegemony of Western social sciences as well as China-centric (as opposed to Taiwanese) academic approaches, its advocates aim to produce and put into practice local knowledge. The purpose, from a methodological perspective, is to analyze indigenous cultures in their own particular language, without any reference to concepts borrowed from foreign cultures. Thus, some researchers use divination practices as an example when arguing against the relevance of Western social scientific concepts and when defining an indigenous methodology to account for the Taiwanese social reality. Moreover, because it is in Taiwan rather than Mainland China that these practices have been best preserved, they can be rehabilitated to become a symbol of national, social, and psychological uniqueness. Thus, the meaning of divination is gradually shifting from a shameful symptom of irrationality toward becoming a feature of Taiwanese traditional culture, attracting tourists and strengthening “Taiwanese identity.”⁸⁵ Yet, despite these developments, practitioners, both in Taiwan and Mainland China, still strive to enhance the status of their activity.

5 Practitioners: The “World of Horoscopy” (*mingli jie* 命理界)⁸⁶ in Chinese Societies

5.1 *Social Diversity among Practitioners*

Professional fortune-telling is a highly differentiated, competitive trade whose hierarchy depends on practitioners’ training, work location, and techniques. In rural areas in Mainland China, villages usually have one or two professional or part-time practitioners who may also have another occupation. They are often highly respected *fengshui* masters who are also proficient in calendar horoscopy or other mantic arts. They either inherited the trade and knowledge from their family, or were taught by a local master when young.⁸⁷ Some Buddhist and Daoist monks also practice mantic arts and are much sought-after for

85 Homola, “Pursue Good Fortune.”

86 Widely used to refer to practitioners of divinatory arts, this expression also includes practitioners who are proficient in techniques other than horoscopy.

87 On the training of professional geomancers with masters in a Sichuan village in the 1990s, see Bruun, *Fengshui in China*. See also Chau, “‘Superstition Specialist Households?’” 157–202.

counseling, although no specific study has ever focused on this topic.⁸⁸ In the cities, street fortune-tellers enjoy a low social status. Many are migrant workers from crowded Chinese provinces such as Henan. They often gather at specific crossing points or crowded places (near temples, universities, hospitals, bus stations, and markets) so that those seeking them know where to find them.⁸⁹ Some wandering fortune-tellers travel from city to city.⁹⁰ They mainly practice face-reading and palm-reading because these techniques can be performed quickly and do not require any equipment. Street fortune-tellers' predilection for face-reading and palm-reading is the main reason why these techniques are sometimes depreciated by other, more "established" diviners.

Professional diviners can provide consultations at their home, in a booth in a dedicated "street of fortune-telling,"⁹¹ in teahouses, or in their own offices. In Taipei, some have modern offices in affluent areas and can boast a waiting list stretching over several weeks. The trade is highly competitive, so practitioners frequently denigrate each other and try to offer unique services, which favors a revival of ancient and sometimes obscure techniques. Practitioners who belong to a hereditary line of mantic arts specialists despise the newly-established diviners who, on their part, build their legitimacy by affiliating themselves with "ancient" schools of thought which are often recent creations.

Amateur or non-professional scholars are the most respected diviners because they do not practice mantic arts for financial reward, although many of them accept gift money (*hongbao* 紅包). Friends, relatives, and connections seek their advice when choosing the name of a new-born baby, for instance. Some academic scholars also practice privately,⁹² often applying the most erudite techniques, such as the *sanshi* methods or the *Book of Changes*.

The hierarchy of divination practices tends to overlap with a gender distinction. Whereas many women can be found among specialists of inspired divination such as mediums, practitioners of the more learned and text-based divinatory arts (*shushu*) are mostly men. Given their exposure or precarious living conditions, I never met or heard about any women being a roadside or wandering fortune-teller. However, the popularization of mantic arts and

88 Useful information can nevertheless be found in monographs on Daoist or Buddhist monks. See, for instance, Herrou, *La vie entre soi*.

89 For case studies on street fortune-tellers in Beijing in the 1990s, see Yi, *Dangdai Zhongguo de suanming re*.

90 Homola, "From *jianghu* to *liumang*."

91 Taipei has two official "streets of fortune-telling," near Xingtian Temple and Longshan Temple. Fortune-tellers often set up their booths in or around the main streets leading to popular temples.

92 Ho, "Preface," in *Chinese Mathematical Astrology*, xi–xv.

changing modes of transmission in the last twenty years have largely opened divinatory arts to women, many of them training as amateur or professional practitioners.

5.2 *Changing Modes of Transmission*

Traditionally, knowledge in divinatory arts is either inherited or transmitted through a master-student relationship. This relationship can be strict in the case of professional diviners, or very loose in the case of amateurs. In the latter case, a common process of knowledge transmission is initiated when a person meets a master locally or when travelling to a famous religious site. Faced with personal difficulties and/or repetitive failure,⁹³ the person seeks advice from diviners or religious specialists. She may become interested in mantic arts, study with the master for a few months, then return home and practice as an amateur among family and friends. If the person wishes to broaden her knowledge and possibly become a part- or full-time professional, she can travel around China and even Southeast Asia, meeting different masters who will teach her various techniques. Such kinds of initiatory trips favor predestined encounters (*yuanfen* 缘分) and provide favorable conditions for the oral transmission of specialized and secret knowledge.

However, from the 1990s in Taiwan and the 2000s in Mainland China, a process of popularization made mantic arts accessible to a wider audience. This phenomenon developed through a shift in the teaching method. An increasing number of practitioners began to offer collective teaching in organized classes.⁹⁴ As a result, two contrasting (ideal-types) modes of knowledge transmission coexist in contemporary China and Taiwan. The first – the master-disciple relationship – is based on oral transmission, secrecy, and a personal and elective relationship between a master and his disciple. The second – the classroom – takes as a model academic education based on the standardization of knowledge in manuals and on open, collective education.

93 While there is no consensus among mantic arts specialists regarding the existence of a specific “diviner’s fate,” interviews with practitioners from non-hereditary lines reveal that the vast majority of them experienced misfortune and started learning mantic arts in order to understand their own bad fate. In the same way as illness is often part of the initiatory journey of mediums, diviners-to-be’s experience of misfortune can become an opportunity to develop specialized knowledge in mantic arts.

94 Criticism of the master-disciple relationship arose as early as the Republican era, when mantic arts specialists such as Yuan Shushan considered this traditional mode of transmission as an obstacle to the adaptation of traditional knowledge to modernity. Thus, Yuan Shushan was one of the first practitioners to organize group lessons in Shanghai in the 1920s. See Li and Lackner, “Contradictory Forms of Knowledge?”

The evolution of the role of teachers also involved a radical change in the transmission tools. Before the reform of mantic arts initiated by specialists such as Yuan Shushan during the Republican era, technical manuals on mantic arts were not designed to replace the master's teaching and were mainly used by specialists as handbooks or mementos. As Ho Peng Yoke notes, these books were not intended to be exhaustive: "Texts describing the system are often quite incomprehensible except to those who understand the system; (...) the author purposely wrote in an incomprehensible way to make [the handbook] useful only to those in the Astronomical Bureau and to selected military officers and advisors."⁹⁵ Whereas classical mantic arts literature tends to be elliptic and obscure, contemporary mantic arts manuals have the stated objective of replacing the masters' teachings. Thus, instead of esoteric poems which require explanation by a master, they make wide use of tables and illustrations to explain the techniques. These books are intended for clients who can conduct their own consultation without having to master the techniques thanks to "do-it-yourself" (*bu qiuren* 不求人) manuals, or for apprentices of divinatory arts who can learn and improve themselves thanks to clear, didactic explanations.

As mentioned above, whereas mantic arts such as calendar horoscopy and *fengshui* used to be performed mainly by men, one important consequence of the popularization of mantic arts is that an increasing number of women are entering the trade. Thus, female practitioner Huixin Zhaizhu 慧心齋主 is undoubtedly one of the personalities who most influenced the development of the *Ziwei doushu* method in Taiwan. As early as the 1970s, she started giving classes to *Ziwei doushu* amateurs, and was renowned for her specialized columns in major newspapers in Taiwan (including the *Zhongguo shibao* 中國時報) and Hong Kong in the early 1980s. Her book, *Ziwei doushu xinquan* 紫微斗數新詮 (A new interpretation of the *Ziwei doushu* method), aroused mass fervor, selling tens of thousands of copies with numerous reeditions (eight between 1981 and 1983).⁹⁶ An increasing number of women also practice as amateurs and advise relatives and friends, thus relieving them of the necessity to consult external fortune-tellers.

As a consequence, the popularization of mantic arts tends to blur categories between professional specialists, amateurs, and clients. The classical distinction between specialists and clients gives way to a continuum along multiple intermediate knowledge levels and contexts of practice which form parts of a learning process. Indeed, as the media report the huge amounts earned by

95 Ho, *Chinese Mathematical Astrology*, 85–86.

96 Huixin Zhaizhu, *Ziwei doushu xinquan*.

certain diviners, an increasing number of people are attracted into the profession, as exemplified by the case of blind people. Throughout Chinese history, divination has been one of the professions that blind people could enter.⁹⁷ They enjoy a reputation for competence and honesty: clients know that they have been trained at an early age, that they have been compelled to learn the techniques by heart, and that they cannot be suspected of cheating by relying on the clients' appearance to read their fate. Moreover, whereas disability is certainly a source of social discrimination, it can also be perceived as the divine mark of a higher being. However, until very recently, given the very low status of fortune-tellers throughout the twentieth century, divination was not considered a desirable career path for young blind people, with the possible exception of children from poor families in remote areas, who lack access to special education. Families by far prefer to train blind children in massage which is nowadays the most frequent professional outlet for visually impaired people. It is only in the last few years that divination as a profession has become attractive again and that mantic arts teachers offer special classes for blind people.

5.3 *Discourses and Forms of Legitimation*

Professional diviners face a major challenge in gaining legitimacy for their art in today's Chinese societies. They seek some kind of recognition from the State which would help them to federate as a profession, establish standards of training and expertise, and thus distinguish themselves from "charlatans" (*jianghu* 江湖). The profession is indeed badly organized. In Mainland China, numerous associations organize conferences with hundreds of participants,⁹⁸ but many associations have only a few members, and the conferences charge high fees for certificates which are virtually worthless. On the one hand, diviners emphasize, in their discourses, a desire to place mantic arts at the service of society and contribute to the common good by predicting earthquakes, air crashes, or economic crises. But, on the other hand, the actors of the world of divination fail to translate into collective action the merits of public interest that they attribute to mantic arts.

Building legitimation for a trade or academic discipline is a multilayered intellectual, social, and political process.⁹⁹ First, practitioners seek to integrate their art into the contemporary organization of knowledge. Through their

97 As she stressed the failure of anti-superstitions policies in the Republican era, Rebecca Nedostup notes that divination provided a means of subsistence for blind and disabled people, whom the authorities failed to integrate into their vast social programs. See Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*.

98 Li, "Diviners with Membership and Certificates," 244–59.

99 Li, *Fate Calculation Experts*.

discourse, writings, and organization of classes and curricula, they aim to affiliate mantic arts with available positive categories such as science, philosophy, culture, cultural heritage, and national studies (*guoxue* 國學).¹⁰⁰ In particular, the “para-academic” development of *guoxue* constitutes a model of institutionalization for mantic arts, as it offers institutional legitimacy while also allowing lucrative educational activities. Future interesting research could focus on the classifications of mantic arts in libraries and bookstores, as well on the terminology used in publications related to mantic arts, such as “rare/lost science” (*juexue* 絕學) or “mysterious science” (*xuanxue* 玄學).

Second, diviners wish to develop relations with the academia but face many obstacles. Practitioners are divided into many schools (*pai* 派) and, despite efforts undertaken along the lines of Yuan Shushan, mantic knowledge still lacks standardization. Moreover, although some scholars are known to practice privately, there is a strict compartmentalization between practitioners and academics. The latter are reluctant to jeopardize their position by supporting the institutionalization of a controversial field of knowledge. However, some fields of mantic arts find their way into academia. *Fengshui*, for example, is taught in some architecture departments, while the history and philosophy of the *Book of Changes* have long formed part of the curriculum of philosophy and literature departments. A noticeable exception in the Chinese academic landscape, the “Center for *Zhouyi* & Ancient Chinese Philosophy,” was founded in the 1980s at the University of Shandong by the charismatic Professor Liu Dajun, who was a pioneer of the post-Maoist *Yixue* revival and is also renowned as a diviner and counselor of high profile political figures. Whereas the Center’s official curriculum features courses on the non-controversial historical aspects of the *Zhouyi* tradition, several teachers also work privately as mantic arts practitioners and provide non-official classes on the practical aspects of divinatory techniques. The scholarly study of mantic arts in China and Taiwan is one of the fields which require more academic attention. Further studies could include a survey of university departments and research centers which lead research programs and offer teachings related to mantic arts.

Third, if practitioners consider that the institutionalization of knowledge transmission in an academic setting is essential for the official recognition of their activity, they also intend to implement divinatory arts within society and the business world, like other technical knowledge such as architecture and medicine. One of the most appropriate legal frames would be a licensed liberal profession which would require state-regulated certification. However, practitioners lack any professional legal status up to now. Most of them are either undeclared or declared as “counseling companies.”

100 Matthews, “Making ‘Science’ from ‘Superstition,’” 173–96.

6 Conclusion

As a “state of the field” work which calls for further research, this chapter aimed to demonstrate why divination matters in Chinese studies, especially in the study of contemporary societies. Divinatory practices give a unique concrete insight into broad social and intellectual changes which are shaping Chinese societies, but which are otherwise hard to grasp and document, such as the moving dividing line between acceptable and rejected knowledge, or the evolving attitude toward the future. This opens the way for fascinating and unexplored research topics: how, for instance, do mantic practice – which can be considered as a form of risk management – evolve as the insurance market develops in Chinese societies? A telling case from Taiwan illustrates this point: a friend of mine in her thirties told me that she had been worried about falling ill because many members of her family had had cancer but, instead of consulting a diviner, as she had been advised by relatives, she bought a specific “cancer” insurance. She felt far more secure after she obtained the insurance and did not feel the need to consult a fortune-teller.

Divination studies also matter in Chinese studies because they are a paradigmatic topic for comparative studies. Not only do they help to situate Chinese studies among global academic disciplines (such as anthropology), but the technical nature of mantic arts also allows to underline the Chinese specificity while preventing the common pitfall of essentialism.

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Index

Explanatory note

In his contribution to the present *Handbook*, Richard Smith enumerates several frequent English translations of key terms that have had a lasting impact on the traditional Chinese worldview. For *wuxing* 五行 he lists “five agents, five activities, five phases, five elements, five qualities, etc.,” and for *qi* 氣 he provides the examples of “life breath, ether energy, pneuma, vital essence, material force, primordial substance, psychophysical stuff, etc.” The “et cetera” points to the fact that the list could easily be expanded, not to mention translations into other western languages. We might add that this bewildering variety can even be observed for the renderings of the titles of the Five Classics, where we encounter, for instance, the *Shijing* 詩經 as “Odes,” “Book of Songs,” “Classic of Poetry,” etc. In a less studied field like divination, to which this volume is devoted, the problem of lacking standardization is all the more manifest. A rigorous standardization in the texts would have violated the respective author’s conceptual purpose. We therefore took the Chinese terms as our point of departure and tagged them with one or two English translations. Names of trigrams and hexagrams and the cyclical signs are not translated. Closely related items, like the so-called “apocrypha” (*chenwei*, *weishu* 讖緯, 緯書, etc., sometimes understood as “prophetic texts”) have been grouped together. For the non-Chinese reader, we have added cross references to the most frequent Chinese terms. Although the degree of terminological homogenization in studies of Western classics is considerably higher, we may take comfort in the diversity of translation terms for 心: intellect, intelligence, intellection, intuition, mind, etc. The present index is an attempt at coping with the broad spectrum of existing – and justifiable – translations, including the “et cetera.”

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